

WE'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN: A BLACK FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF
ELEANOR SMEAL'S NATIONAL PRESS CLUB ADDRESS

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The voices of black women have traditionally been excluded from rhetorical scholarship, both as a subject of study and as a methodological approach. Despite the little attention black feminist thought has received, black women have long been articulating the unique intersection of oppressions they face and have been developing critical epistemologies.

This study analyzes the National Press Club address given by NOW President Eleanor Smeal utilizing a black feminist methodological approach. The study constructs a black feminist theory for the communication discipline and applies it to a discursive artifact from the women's liberation movement. The implications of the study include the introduction of a new methodological approach to the communication discipline that can expand the liberatory reach of its scholarship.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Very few groups in America have had their identity so socialized out of existence as have black women (hooks, *Ain't* 7). Sexism and racism have served as oppressive forces and barriers in the lives of these marginalized women, ultimately affecting every aspect of their lives. The institutionalization of both sexism and racism has formed a foundation in the American social structure that can be traced to the first days of the republic. Sexism was an integral mainstay of the political and social order that white colonizers brought with them from their European homelands (hooks, *Ain't* 15). Racism has also played an instrumental role in the formation of Western culture, dating back to the slave trade in early colonial societies. Racism and white supremacy, grounded in the notion of privilege, is an illness in which society is far from finding a cure for (Grillo and Wilman 397). Many believe that the devaluation of black womanhood ended with the dismantling of the institution of slavery. However, bell hooks advances the belief that dehumanization and oppression of black women, although altered from the days of slavery, still continues today, primarily out of fear of black women gaining self-confidence and self-respect (*Ain't* 59).

Individuals at the center of this intersection of race and gender have long faced a unique and magnified oppression. The debate about whether race, sex, or the intersection of the two is the major source of oppression has divided black and white women in

current and past gender liberation struggles. This debate has also often divided black women and black men in their fight for racial equality (Joseph and Lewis 20). Since the formation of the feminist movement in the United States, black women have been questioning the notion of a unitary “women’s experience” (Harris 586). The purpose of this study is to introduce black feminist perspectives as a method of rhetorical inquiry of women’s liberation movement discourse.

The fight for freedom by women of color has been lengthy and arduous. In 1893, speaking before the World Congress of Representative Women, Anna Cooper spoke of the status of black women in this society:

The higher fruits of civilization cannot be extemporized, neither can they be developed normally in the brief space of thirty years. It requires the long and painful growth of generations...The white woman could at least plead for her own emancipation; the black woman doubly enslaved, could but suffer and struggle and be silent. (hooks, *Ain’t* 2)

Cooper’s address unveiled a voicing of a black female’s experience from which other black women often articulated, such as Sojourner Truth and Amanda Berry Smith. These women often emphasized the barriers for their simultaneous participation in the black male suffrage movement and the women’s suffrage movement. As the fight for suffrage and the women’s movement began to materialize, the concept of womanhood only encompassed middle-class white women. Poor women, immigrant women, and women of color could not live up to the carved-out roles. Economic pressures and hardships, as

well as enslavement, often forced these women outside of the home, and they were routinely stereotyped as unfeminine (Campbell 103).

The women's movement also began to isolate itself from alliances with the black community when it was apparent that black men would get the vote before women would. Although black women and men had struggled equally for freedom during slavery, black male political leaders upheld patriarchal values. As black men gained more and more freedoms in the years following the Reconstruction era, black women were encouraged to maintain a more subservient standing (hooks, *Ain't* 4). Black women were placed in a double bind: to support black male suffrage was to support a patriarchal order that would only further serve to silence their voice, but to support the women's suffrage movement would show an alliance with activists who publicly displayed their racism.

This double bind did not end with the early suffrage movements. The movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s for civil rights were inherently connected and became another battleground for the advancement of rights for oppressed groups. The Civil Rights Movement brought social change for the lives of all Americans. The early women's movement drew inspiration from the action taken by the Civil Rights Movement. The National Organization of Women was formed in 1966 and became the symbolic, defining organization of the recent women's movement (Joseph and Lewis 58). Black women devoted time and resources to both movements. However, for a variety of reasons, the women's movement evolved into a collective that was largely white and unable to deal with race issues (Hull, Scott and Smith xx). Splinter organizations from

the mainstream women's movement started forming under the leadership of minority women. The stated purposes of these organizations were to address the unique oppression that women of color faced and to provide an answer to the pitfalls that minority women encountered in the mainstream women's movement. The National Black Feminist Organization, formed in 1972, was one of the first organized black feminist groups in the country (Joseph and Lewis 33).

Through the application of social movement theory and black feminist theory, this study analyzes the rhetoric of a former president of a women's activist organization. Through the lens of black feminism as a criticism of the women's movement, the rhetoric will be studied critically to determine if it contains themes that are often raised as criticism of the women's movement. Former National Organization of Women president Eleanor Smeal's 1985 address before the National Press Conference will be the primary artifact of analysis.

Review of Literature

Studies by and about women are increasing their prominence in the communication discipline (Rakow 209; Spitzack and Carter 401). Women are increasing their numbers in collegiate communication departments. More courses on gender and feminism are being added to curricula offerings. Articles written by women in the field are becoming more numerous. Journals have been created that are devoted entirely to the study of women in the communication discipline (Foss and Foss, "The Status" 195). However, this pattern of a sheer increase in numbers does not accurately depict the history of women in communication, especially within the study of rhetoric. These

trends are also not indicators that an understanding of the paradigms from which women's communication comes has been achieved.

The feminist approach to rhetoric started to appear in the communication discipline during the decades of the civil rights movement. In a 1973 essay by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell entitled "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation," the author advances that the rhetoric of the women's movement is comprised of unique stylistic and substantive devices that warrants a unique genre of classification (84). Campbell's essay was followed a year later by Cheris Kramarae's work on gender differences on linguistic signals. Kramarae also asked for women as rhetors to be considered on an individual basis rather than a part of a general category (24).

Carole Spitzack and Kathryn Carter, working from an earlier model by Peggy McIntosh, provide a five-prong conceptualization of how women are present in communication research: womanless communication, great women communicators, women as other, the politics of women as other, and women as communicators (401). This examination of women's role in the communication discipline serves as an appropriate starting point for an understanding of how women's rhetoric has been included, or excluded, from research.

Womanless communication research is that which is void of women in its account and depiction of human communication (Spitzack and Carter 402). McIntosh asserts that women were left out because the research was focused on those that wielded the power and were involved with areas in the public sphere, such as law making and the acquiring of territory (7). Karen Vonnegut, in her feminist analysis of early American public

address, also highlights the traditional belief that women rhetors did not exist before 1830. Because it was considered inappropriate and improper for women to speak in public in the days of the founding of the nation, rhetoricians assumed that women did not voice their opinion (29).

Voices of women are almost entirely absent from the classrooms of American Public Address studies. Victoria DeFrancisco and Marvin Jensen report that speeches by women are often times not recorded and analyzed (ix). Vonnegut writes of one major midwestern university that has been hailed for its excellence in training of public address scholars. Out of the 100 texts that students were exposed to over a four-course study, only six were by women. At another highly acclaimed institution, the two American Public Address courses do not include a single text by women rhetors to be analyzed (Vonnegut 28). Studies by J. Andrews and David Zarefsky, J.L. Lucaites, Douglas Thomas and R.F. Reid demonstrate that these examples are typical of the study of American Public Address.

Not only are classes lacking in their inclusion of women communicators, but so are textbooks in the discipline. There is very little acknowledgement of women in writings of early American rhetoric. Of the four books that examine rhetoric and propaganda of the American Revolution, only two make brief mention of women. Both cite the one example of female playwright Mercy Otis Warren as the totality of women's rhetorical contribution of the Revolutionary era (Vonnegut 28). In *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, only two of the 48 texts are about women. The first essay mentioning women orators supplies short biographical depictions of various

women who spoke about suffrage, and the second is a more detailed analysis of Susan B. Anthony. Vonnegut writes that the implication behind this is that women contributed to American public address only for a few decades in the nineteenth century (28). As cited by Spitzack and Carter, Karlyn Campbell surveyed over 45 speech anthologies where only 52 speeches out of the thousands that were included were by women (402). Campbell followed up on this study by reporting the lack of women's voices in speech anthologies in a 1991 study ("Hearing" 48).

There exists an even larger absence of recorded rhetoric of minority women (DeFrancisco and Jensen xi). Campbell notes that early texts of minority women are difficult to obtain because their speech was often censored ("Style" 434). However, lack of texts from present day minority women is also significant. DeFrancisco and Jensen include a passage of a speech given by black lesbian activist, Angela Bowman, who addressed similar concerns of neglect of minority women voices in the discipline. Ironically, the editors wanted to include the entirety of Bowman's text in their anthology but the conference organizers at the university she spoke at lost the videotape (xi).

This lack of representation of women in the discipline can also be found within publication venues that communication studies scholars publish in. Karen Foss and Sonja Foss report that low numbers of female-authored articles and studies about women are included in discipline-oriented publications (195). Specifically, Carole Blair, Julie Brown, and Leslie Baxter devote an entire journal article to exposing the masculinist disciplinary ideology of the publication process within the communication discipline. Blair, Brown and Baxter had submitted an article that contained narratives of sexual

harassment victims to be published in a journal within the discipline. The analysis was reviewed by an anonymous panel of reviewers and rejected. The authors were told that their article contained “too many feline, petty attacks...and too much ball-bashing to be a scholarly article” (398). Another referee wrote that the authors were “unprofessional” and “anti-intellectual” and that he/she was “embarrassed” for the communication discipline for creating professionals that wrote the “single worst piece of scholarship” that he/she had reviewed (398). Toward the end of the review, the referees created a list of criteria that professional research scholars should try to be politically neutral, respectful toward science, mainstream, and politically deferential (398).

The minimal representation of women on communication faculties also demonstrates the absence of women from the discipline. The sheer numbers of women to men faculty ratios is not descriptive of the entire story. Rakow writes of the chilly climate that exists in communication departments for women who want to study feminist approaches (210).

Why has the communication discipline remained primarily void of the voice of women? The literature points to a variety of explanations. Vonnegut believes that rhetors traditionally do not believe that women spoke in the public spheres in the early stages of American history, which partially explains the absence of women in historical anthologies (29). Spitzack and Carter assert that George Kennedy’s observations in his analysis of rhetoric provide an answer (402). Kennedy espouses that history is documented through the lens of a specific perspective that led to a void in cultural and historical records of the voice of the majority of the world’s population (3). It is often a

privileged minority group that is primarily pervasive through historical records. The traditional societal feminine role has been focused on childcare and maintaining the familial unit, so their speech was often not documented (Spitzack and Carter 404). Spitzack and Carter also point to the commonly held stereotype that women are poor communicators as a reason for their absence from the discipline (403).

The second type of feminist communication research outlined by Spitzack and Carter is the study of the great women speakers. Rather than excluding women from objects of analysis, these studies describe women as conscious actors who influence societal forces (405). Some of the above-cited American Public Address textbooks focused on women, such as Susan B. Anthony and Mercy Otis Warren, as great women speakers. To analyze influential women serve two important functions: it is a recognition of female influence in public domains, and a reevaluation of taken-for-granted speaking styles and arenas (Spitzack and Carter 405).

However, studying women's rhetoric under the veil of great women speakers can be counterproductive. Spitzack and Carter write that "the appearance of a few great women can easily support the presumption that the majority of women cannot rival male counterparts. Great women are presumed to be atypical, and simultaneously they are thought to represent the concerns and styles of women" (405). Mary Daly asserts that the sheer presence of the concept of greatness is exclusionary and the fact that women's speaking is driven by a desire to mirror the record of men's achievements is implicit (24). This approach fails to recognize the value in the study of women who are not famous, great, or well known according to the entrenched masculine standards. Women as

speakers should not be ignored, but the concept of greatness needs to be reconfigured. Rhetorical theory need not solely focus on individual greatness and influence, but also on rhetorical strategies employed by groups of average women. Research directed in this fashion can foster a better understanding of how feminine identity is constructed. Celeste Condit Railsback's research on the various rhetorical choices utilized by women infused in the abortion debate is a prime example of how rhetorical studies can depict identity constructions (410). Kent Ono and John Sloop also provide research on women as communicators by focusing on the vernacular of Japanese American Women during World War II ("The Critique" 23).

The third paradigm that communication research of women can fall under is defined by Spitzack and Carter as "Woman as Other." This expands on women as great speakers by introducing the variable of gender in small group environments, organizational and business cultures, and interpersonal relationships. It calls for an examination of the feminine as the other in comparison to male norms and standards (Spitzack and Carter 407).

Various studies involving the study of gender and the communication process compare and contrast masculine speaking styles to their feminine counterparts. Many of these studies have emerged from findings in psychology that focus on behavior deviations of males and females. Sandra Bem created the Bem Sex-Role Inventory, which was a questionnaire used by researchers to measure characteristics of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny. This shifted the focus in the discipline from looking at

gender as a biological sex trait to a psychological gender-role orientation (Pearson et al 20).

According to Spitzack and Carter, there are three overarching principles that guide research in this particular arena. First, research has been aimed at locating sex differences in pinpointing variations that exist in phonology, pitch, and intonation. Barry Thorne and Nancy Henley have focused on linguistic and phonetic variations between the sexes since their preliminary research findings of the mid-1970s. Second, scholars investigate the degree to which linguistic behaviors are characterized as masculine and feminine, such as profanity and politeness. Finally, communication competence is often determined based on sex differences in communication styles. An identical statement can often lead to different competence ratings depending on if it was said by a male or female (408).

The female difference within the communication process is often viewed as inferior to the traditional standard that finds competence in all communication that is masculine in its usage (Spitzack and Carter 409). Robin Lakoff's early study of feminine communication patterns suggests that the linguistic choices that women make are tentative, uncertain, and indecisive (19). Critics of Lakoff and others that make similar statements argue that conclusions such as these use the typical male linguistic pattern as the norm and compare women against it. It would be impossible to find positive attributes associated with feminine styles of communication if the template that is used is immersed in masculine standards. Differences in feminine communication styles would be seen as deficiencies when compared to the masculine norm. Female deficiencies

stylistically are already inherently presumed within the research (Pillota 49; Spender 8; Thorne, Kramarae, and Henley 12). Douglas Thomas writes that "women are held to standards of rhetorical excellence based on overcoming their gender, while males are held to different standards based on the ability to overcome problems of a rhetorical situation" (46).

The notion of "Women as Other" in the communication discipline is not always found in overt differences, but through the way scholars frame communication theories. Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin advance that a patriarchal bias is forwarded by merely defining rhetoric as persuasion. The implicit notion in this definition is the desire to change others and exert control over them, which Foss and Griffin define as the rhetoric of patriarchy (3). Foss, Foss, and Griffin also state that classical definitions of rhetoric suggest that it takes place in a public sphere of religion, law, political debate, and public ceremonial occasions. Traditional occupants of this sphere usually included rich white males (6). Scholars in the field also report that the current study of argumentation is entrenched with patriarchal undertones and, often, excludes the female voice (Bruner 183; Hynes 464; Palczewski 161). Catherine Palczewski writes that feminists have concluded that argumentation as a process has been steeped in adversarial assumptions and gendered expectations and points to the analogy of argument to war as a primary example (167). M. Lane Bruner concludes that even feminist approaches to argumentation reify gender stereotypes because of the assumption that men and women argue differently and that studies of argumentation should avoid essentializing based on biological characteristics (185).

The fourth paradigm outlined by Spitzack and Carter is “the Politics of Woman as Other.” Communication exchanges are often evaluated based on the societal context in which they are found. The female experience is often deemed inferior by the dominant culture so communication that inherently exists within that experience is therefore also labeled deficient compared to an identical masculine exchange from a masculine experience (Spitzack and Carter 410). Blair, Brown and Baxter’s research on sexual harassment narratives is a prime example. The original submission of the reporting of narratives by women as they told their stories of harassment was deemed unworthy of scholarly publication (386). Ellen DuBois reports the differences in societal perception that exists in telling of experiences by men and women. When a woman engages in discussing her experience, she is believed to be advancing girl-talk or gossip. Men that advance in the process of telling an experience are perceived as making a point or stating a position (DuBois 23; Spitzack and Carter 410). In argumentation, scholars conclude that women rely on the role of personal testimony as proof of the claim (Campbell, *Man* 12-13; MacKinnon 527; Palczewski 162). Foss and Griffin propose that a study of invitational rhetoric should occur that is reliant upon feminist principles that advance the commitment of the formation of relationships of equality and the deterioration of the dominance that influences most relationships (5).

Spitzack and Carter report that research into the female experience details complex forms of communication processes, relationships, and reasoning (411). Several communication scholars describe the feminine communication behavior as cooperative and transactions instead of competitive and linear (Jenkins and Kramer 67; Jones 193;

Kalcik 3; Spitzack and Carter 411). Carole Edelsky and others report that storytelling is a primary rhetorical strategy that women engage in to maintain closeness with those that are engaged in the communication process (Edelsky 383; Kalcik 3). Carol Gilligan writes that the majority of women try to maintain their interpersonal relationships, not through a process of regulations and exchanges, but through an ethic of care. She points to the example of boys and girls playing a child's game. Boys are more than likely to play high priority on following the rules whereas the girls are more likely to stop or suspend the game when the interpersonal relationships are hindered by the rules of the game (Gilligan 9).

Spitzack and Carter point to a unique problem relative to communication departments in treating women as the political other. To try to study women's experience still remains a challenge to academia. Courses in women's communication are still considered a "specialty area." Spitzack and Carter argue that separating gender from mainstream, traditional communication areas sends a strong signal that the study of women is marginal and "lacks import for the discipline as a whole" (414). Further proof resides in the outcry of criticism that has occurred from the 1992 report by Hickson, Stacks, and Amsbary entitled "Active Prolific Female Scholars in Communication." This report, unique in its separating of a group of professionals from the mainstream, ranks women in the field of communication studies based on the number of academic publications that each has received (Blair, Brown and Baxter 387). Blair, Brown, and Baxter argue that the Hickson, Stacks, and Amsbary report is a:

thematic marker of a masculinist ideology...we were fearful that Hickson

et al.'s analysis of prolific female scholars would be embraced as a positive statement about women and for women in the discipline and that the masculinist ideology that ironically undergirds the analysis might be disregarded...we are left with the issue of what licenses three men to single out women as a group for scrutiny. (387-394)

The final paradigm outlined by Spitzack and Carter is the advancement of women as communicators (415). This is an ongoing endeavor that has not been achieved yet, either in this discipline or in society as a whole. The term feminist is still considered a negative term, even in academia, with a variety of social and political strings attached. Few tenured practicing feminists exist in the communication field (Rakow 210). Spitzack and Carter write that "the point at which all communication scholars acknowledge the culturally sedimented presumptions contained in their views is the point at which, as a discipline, women can be seen as communicators" (415).

One overarching principle that is not included in Spitzack and Carter's synthesis of the communication discipline is the inclusion of women of color. Although rhetoric by women of color can easily fit into any of the five paradigms that Spitzack and Carter outline, the lack of minority women communicators is also a testament to the lack of focus that the communication discipline has placed on these individuals that possess a unique intersection of immutable characteristics (Stanback 28). A proliferation of black feminist perspectives in other disciplines, such as history and literature, has emerged over the past two decades (O. Davis 77; Powell 34). However, there has been little discussion of minority women communicators within the discipline. There have been even fewer

applications and criticisms of the feminist rhetorical project through the perspectives of women of color. The studies that have been completed on black feminist rhetors have been studied through a white female communication norm. Much of what is categorized as research that is inclusive of all women is based on examples that are predominantly white (Stanback 30). Marsha Houston Stanback states that this methodological approach to women of color in the communication discipline is as “objectionable an act as evaluating women’s communication according to male norms” (28).

Another indicator of the absence of women of color from the study of rhetoric is the amount of attention devoted to African-American male rhetors. Numerous studies of public addresses by minority men, such as Stokely Carmichael, Cesar Chavez, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Jesse Jackson, have been done (Sullivan 1; Lucaites and Condit 457; Pollock 92; Hammerback and Jensen 166; Snow 318; DiMare 218) as well as black nationalist rhetoric (Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Radical” 151). Even though some of these studies claim to be investigating how discourse shapes the minority community, the focus of the studies use text only by minority men (O. Davis 82). Specifically, Lucaites and Condit talk about the black community and "the dream of equality" of "black and white Americans" without ever referencing gender in their research (462).

In one of the few disciplinary studies on women of color, Olga Davis defines two assumptions that are implied from the lack of representation of minority women in rhetorical research. First, Davis advances that lack of study of the black women's rhetoric implies that minority women's standpoints are similar to the social realities experienced by white women. Second, rhetorical pundits fail to see the significance in

the ways minority women create meaning through their words (O. Davis 78). It is imperative that these gaps that exist in this discipline's research be filled in order to advance the goal of de-centering our ontological claims from a patriarchal system to one that embraces a diversity of marginalized voices.

Aside from looking at how women enter the discipline and how they are studied in the communication discipline, it is important to include literature that provides guidance on engaging in the endeavor of the study of feminist thought and women's liberation. Karen Foss, Sonja Foss, and Robert Trapp provide three main assumptions that underscore any feminist perspectives on theory or research, including the study of rhetoric. The first assumption is that gender has been constructed so that the experiences of women are often subordinated to those of men. Second, the feminist perspective values women's perceptions, experiences and meanings. Finally, the feminist paradigm operates under the belief that its primary purpose is to improve the lives of women (275). However, further study in black feminist criticism is needed in order to challenge the validity of the application of these tenets to all women's liberation discourse.

Statement of the Problem

Over the past two decades, feminist rhetorical scholarship has, for the most part, focused exclusively on elite, white women. Often times, these women were members of the women's movement or a member of this nation's political establishment. The first rationale for this exclusion is the relatively recent focus on women communicators. It has only been two decades since feminist thought has been included in the communication discipline. The natural tendency is to study the artifacts from the

mainstream of the women's movement. Speeches by political elites and social movement leaders were the most readily accessible. It is easy to obtain rhetorical artifacts from congressional testimonies or National Press Club speeches. The women who speak in these public arenas are overwhelmingly white and, therefore, contribute to the disproportionate number of white women being studied in the communication discipline. A second rationale for the exclusion of the minority women voices from the discipline is the lack of credibility that feminist thought still receives from academia. It is difficult to make room for criticisms of feminism and women's rhetorical theory when the study of feminism has not been wholly embraced.

However, many feminists argue that feminism is more than eliminating inequities based on sex. bell hooks describes the ability to be feminist is the ability to "want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression...feminism directs our attention to systems of domination and the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression (Foss, Foss, and Griffin 78). To understand feminism is not merely to understand forms of domination that pertain to gender roles, but to understand how power relations and domination infiltrates all forms of oppression. Even though feminists within the communication discipline may find it initially counterproductive to engage in projects that are critical of the feminist perspective, the absence of the alternative voice from the feminist discussion can only aid in the maintenance of the current framework of domination. It is imperative that the discipline understands that the very feminist rhetoric that is celebrated often silences and alienates women of color in this country. Black feminist perspectives are ignored both as a site of

discourse to be studied and as a critical approach for analyzing rhetoric. To that end, the following research questions are advanced: What theories exist in the study of black feminism that unify it as a collective criticism of the women's movement? What themes or patterns emerge in Eleanor Smeal's rhetoric that is susceptible to black feminist criticism? The lack of analysis that exists in communication scholarship on the critical response of black feminists to the women's movement warrants research in order to make more room for diversified marginalized voices and to, ultimately, eliminate patterns of domination that feminists seek.

Scope

It is important to note that this study of black feminist perspectives on an artifact of women's liberation discourse is to serve as a springboard for further theorizing and application in the communication studies discipline. The black feminist theories constructed in this project are not absolutist nor universalist claims. One paradigm that is distinctively clear in the black feminism literature is that the process of theorizing is not a static one. Black feminist perspectives are meant to include a variety of voices and experiences and to be amenable to change. This study only addresses black feminist perspectives of domestic orientation. To address transnational black feminism reaches far outside the scope of this project.

Significance

The significance of this study can be detailed on three different, yet interdependent, levels: the impact of the study for the discipline, the impact of the study for society, and the impact of the study on the individual researcher. First, this study can

provide benefits to the field of rhetorical theory. Initially, it can provide a more diversified approach to rhetoric. Foss and Griffin write that to focus on communication through a feminist perspective is to expand the scope of rhetorical theory and better the discipline's ability to study and explain variations of the communication phenomena (2). By using black feminist perspectives as a vehicle for analyzing women's movement discourse, this study will further expand the parameters of the discipline's understanding of oppressive discourse. Second, the mere act of engaging in the feminist critical project keeps the challenge of including women communicators in this discipline's scholarship. Spitzack and Carter write "unless investigations of women serve to challenge and complicate depictions of human communication, the insights gained by gender and feminist scholars are easily placed back into the pre-established frameworks that have been found to distort women's communication" (401). Without consistent scholarship focused on women communicators, the ground that has been made by feminist rhetorical scholars will be co-opted and nullified by the patterns of domination that still exist. This study serves not only as a continuation of the focus this discipline has placed on women rhetors but to challenge our assumptions through a different perspective about the liberation discourse created by the women's movement.

Moreover, the significance of the proposed study is not confined to the boundaries of academe. The use of a critical approach provides an opportunity for the questioning of fundamental assumptions that guide societal practices outside the walls of an academic institution. Peter Andersen writes "to the extent that ordinary citizens are unable to articulate or criticize the discursive conditions that cause or maintain unfair and

destructive practices, we academic rhetoricians must bear some responsibility for their silence” (253). The primary goal of the rhetoric created in the women’s movement has been to unmask and prevent struggles of oppression. If that very rhetoric also serves to reify that which it is trying to escape, it is, therefore, essential that it too be revealed. The intentions behind this study are to unveil the oppressive discourse used by the women’s movement as women of color perceive it. It is only through constant examination and criticism that society can continue with the dismantling of the inherent patriarchy that is found within social structures and relationships.

The final level of significance that this research gains is to the individual researcher. The benefits that are gained from undertaking a critical endeavor that are self-reflexive can be tremendous. Although my feminist beliefs, as well as my white skin color, can certainly be considered a bias that may inherently alter my findings, it is imperative that we, as members of the academic community, constantly question and criticize our beliefs. The purpose of this study is not merely limited to providing an analysis that takes a specific rhetorical artifact and utilizes a methodology to criticize it. This study is also a means by which one individual in this discipline can find further empowerment through the further understanding of oppressive structures that are inherent in our societal foundations. It is through that newly created self-empowerment that an active agent of change can further be developed in order to stimulate growth within the discipline. The fact that I am a white feminist is not a reason for me to shy away from analyzing black womanist perspectives that are critical of beliefs that I have long held.

Ultimately, it is only a reason for me to embrace the research as a chance to better myself so that I can ultimately infect others.

Methods

The rhetorical artifact for this study will primarily include the text of the September 1985 National Press Club speech given by Eleanor Smeal shortly after re-election as president of the National Organization for Women. A complete transcript of her address is located in DeFrancisco and Jensen's anthology titled *Women's Voices in Our Time* (33). This version was readily accessible for study and appears authentic with other transcripts of Smeal's address. Other data for the study will include press coverage and editorials pertaining to Smeal's address as well as the highly publicized election for the NOW presidency.

The study will examine this text of women's liberation discourse through a black feminist critical perspective in order to see what the perspective can tell us about the speech, specifically about the struggle at the intersections of race and sex. Various themes emerge in the black feminist literature, such as essentialism, race-to-sex analogies, references to experiences pertaining only to white women, identity politics, and white solipism, which serve as criticisms of feminist theory. These themes will be explained in greater detail in later chapters. This study will incorporate themes of black feminist criticisms and apply them to patterns of discourse that are found in the text of Smeal's address. The application will also explore the possible marginalizing implications of Smeal's liberation discourse to women of color.

The qualitative genre of this analysis prevents its generalizability to other social movement discourse and, even, other discourse found in the women's movement. The purpose of this study is to look at one artifact and to draw conclusions based on that alone. The advancement of the methodology and the incorporation of the black feminist critical project are as important as the answers that I find to the proposed research questions. It is this further inclusion of black feminist voices into the communication discipline that will provide a springboard for further studies of women's movement discourse.

Plan of Reporting

The analysis will be organized into five chapters, starting with the introduction in chapter one. Chapter two will examine the existing literature on social movement theory and countermovements. The women's movement and themes that are contained in the black feminist criticism will be explored in chapter three. Chapter four will report the themes that are discussed in chapters two and three and will apply them to Eleanor Smeal's address and to the three research questions proposed. Finally, chapter five will provide responses to the outlined research questions and summarize the relation of the responses to the significance of this study. The chapter will also provide direction on future study of feminism and women's movement discourse through the lens of the black feminist critical project.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Social movements provide an opportunity for groups to open up rhetorical space in order to achieve a common goal. Social movements have been integral forces for change and resistance in American history since the revolutionary era of the 1700's (Stewart 77). However, few studies actually exist in the communication discipline regarding social movements prior to 1965. The research that was completed typically involved analyzing predominant forms of discourse of individual orators that could be identified with a collective (Zarefsky 245). The next fifteen years witnessed an explosion of research in the field, perhaps relating to the appearance of social movements in the mediated American society (Lucas 257). The Civil Rights, Vietnam and Black Power protests of the 1960's and the Women's Movement in the 1970's sparked incredible interest in social movements in the field of rhetoric (Brock 67). However, scholars in the field have yet to complete functional approaches in which to study social movements (Wilkinson 88). These scholars are still attempting to compare and contrast numerous methodologies and to analyze differing intervening relationships among the varying theoretical viewpoints (Brock 67). Scholars conclude that major gaps still exist in this discipline's knowledge of social movements (Griffin, "On" 232; Zarefsky 254; Lucas 255; Andrews 68). Research has mainly focused on case studies of specific leaders, actions, and messages of particular organizations. However, these case studies typically

reveal little more than their isolated concerns and often focus on discursive events and artifacts that deviate from the norm (Stewart 77).

The function of this chapter is to demonstrate the importance of discourse in the facilitation and maintenance of a social movement, to detail the history of the women's movement, and to introduce the divisions between white and black women in the movement. This chapter will provide a brief review of what social movements are, the types of social movements that exist, and how they are initiated. More specifically, the chapter will focus on how discourse effects mobilization through literature by Leland Griffin, Ralph Smith, Russel Windes, Andrew King, Eric Hirsch, and others. Aside from mobilization, discourse is also important to the completion of the movement's goals as evidenced through research by Robert Cathcart and Herbert Blumer.

Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson state that exact definitions of social movements are often difficult to arrive at (1). In his 1952 study, Leland Griffin unmasks the rhetorical efforts of marginal groups that seek to unify their voices and critique society through developing a rhetorical space that was outside the normal channels of communication ("The Rhetoric" 184). He calls for emphasis to be placed not on an individual speaker, but on groups of orators (Wilkinson 88). Griffin provides one of the discipline's earliest definitions of social movements. For the purpose of this study, social movements will be defined as a collection of persons who seek to alter, redefine, or reinforce the social order (Griffin, "Rhetorical" 115). Charles Wilkinson expands on this definition by adding a rhetorical bent to the definition. Wilkinson defines the rhetorical nature of movements as:

language strategies by which a significantly vocal part of an established society, experiencing together a sustained dialectical tension growing out of moral conflict, agitate to induce cooperation in others, either directly or indirectly, thereby affecting the status quo. (91)

Over a decade after Griffin's initial research on movements, Edwin Black advanced three approaches to the practice of rhetorical criticism: the movement study, the neo-Aristotelian study, and the psychological study (22). Even though few studies had been completed in the discipline regarding movements, the placing of movement study along side the established neo-Aristotelian study highlighted the importance of the social movement perspective (Wilkinson 89).

Herbert Blumer details the specific types of movements that exist. Blumer identifies general, specific, expressive, revival, and nationalistic movements, each with its own particular prescribed set of characteristics ("Social" 9). Ralph Smith and Russell Windes expand the list by adding innovational movements. These movements are created to protect existing structures and belief systems. They lack the questioning of existing social values and do not attempt to change the social hierarchy ("The Innovational" 143).

Often times, social movements operate through social movement organizations (SMOs) that rely primarily on paid leaders and constituents who donate money (Staggenberg 99). Suzanne Staggenberg argues that two types of SMOs can exist – formal and informal. Formal SMOs have established procedures that allow the group to complete various tasks routinely and to maintain goal consistency when the leadership

changes. Informal SMOs often lack codified procedures, have loose membership expectations, and little division of labor (Stannenberg 103). Decisions are often made on an ad-hoc basis (Rothschild-Whitt 513). Individual leaders have incredible influence over the continuation of the organization and tend to be volunteers (Stannenberg 103).

It is important to look at how social movements are formed, both for the discipline and for this analysis. Freeman states that three elements are needed in order for individuals to come together to form a social movement: a pre-existing communications network, the network must be amenable to the new ideas generated by the movement, and either a crisis or a newly formed organization must develop in order for the individuals to assemble around (7-8). Coinciding with Freeman's movement origination theory, Michael Lipsky argues that a social movement has been formed when protest activity occurs. Lipsky defines protest activity as:

a mode of political action oriented toward objection to one or more policies or conditions, characterized by showmanship [sic] or display of an unconventional nature and undertaken to obtain rewards from political or economic systems while working within the systems (1145).

Roberta Ann Johnson applies Freeman and Lipsky's mobilization theories to the protests of the disabled in the late 1970s. Johnson points to the advantages of the movement maintaining specific and achievable goals as well as including third parties as external bargaining sources (33).

Rhetorical scholars have traditionally entered the realm of social movement research either from a historical perspective or theoretical perspective (Zarefsky 245;

Griffin, “Studying” 230; McGee, “Social” 238; J. Andrews, “History” 274; Wilkinson 88). The researcher from the historical perspective seeks to advance claims about the movement’s development through its relation to past events. In contrast, the scholar utilizing the theoretical perspective will create generalizable claims about patterns of persuasion germane to social movements (Zarefsky 245). Robert Cathcart notes that this dichotomy exists in the social movement research and advances that it is mirroring the schism and the disagreements that exist over the very nature of rhetoric itself (“A Confrontation” 69).

In the historical perspective, scholars research and make conclusions about the movement’s development and its interaction with other events. Ralph Smith argues that historical critics typically place emphasis on the knowledge acquired from a focused effort to detail a sequence of past events and to formulate the causes, context, and consequences of related events (290). James Andrews claims that an historical approach must “eschew pre-conceived theory...what historical scholarship should yield...is a description and explanation of unique patterns of rhetorical behavior and the relationship of those patterns to the social milieu in which they grew and developed” (“Historical” 68).

Diverging from the historical perspective, the theoretical perspective or sociological perspective is employed when the researcher makes generalizable claims about the persuasive strategies advanced by the movement (Zarefsky 245). Herbert Simons articulated the idea that social movements are unique forms of persuasion in a 1970 study. Although Simons agrees with Griffin’s early work about the need for

movement methodology in the discipline, he focuses on the theoretical, sociological perspective of movements, instead of the historical focus employed by Griffin (1). Following Simons' example, Dan Hahn and Ruth Gonchar further the theoretical perspective by applying traditional Aristotelian methodologies of the rhetorical scholar to social movements (44). However, Hahn and Gonchar were later criticized by Wilkinson and others for not creating or embracing a methodology that was germane to the rhetorical nature of social movements (90). Andrews also criticizes the sociological perspective by arguing that the discipline has not yet identified unique patterns inherent in movement discourse. Without those identified patterns, a theoretical perspective can not accurately be developed ("Historical" 68).

After the historical and theoretical perspectives were explored and criticized by scholars in the field, research began to focus on the unique rhetorical strategies that defined social movements. Charles Wilkinson states that social movements embrace a "linguaging strategy" which activates the word language and expands the term to include the act of language as a symbol. He also advances that social movements are rhetorical because they are persuasive strategies that pursue goals to create, protect, reform, and reject (92). Wilkinson claims that this does not exclude the historical and sociological approaches, however. Movements do occur at a specific time in history and do occur in society, which makes them historical and sociological (92). Those approaches in isolation, however, do not go far enough to explain the discursive mechanisms employed by the movement in relation to the movement's goals.

The idea of the movement being situational is later affirmed and expanded by Michael McGee who had commented that he had previously viewed social movements as a physical act. He argues that it is imperative for rhetorical scholars to study movements as inherently linguistic instead of an isolated rhetorical event (“In Search” 236). In a later essay, McGee argues that scholars can prove the existence of movements by witnessing and noting changes in the ideographic composition of social norm-systems (“Social Movement” 243). He further advances that “social movement” ought not to be a concept that scholars use to begin research, but that which should conclude our research. A social movement is created when rhetorical devices by individuals become an effective unifying device (“Social Movement” 244).

Another perspective that has been generated and discussed by the discipline is Charles Stewart’s functional perspective. This methodology rests on the belief that “rhetoric is the primary agency through which social movements must perform vital functions which enable them to come into existence, to remain viable collectives, to meet opposition, and to bring about or to resist change” (Stewart 78). The rhetorical scholar may use any rhetorical premise or theory that will lead to more information and insight into how rhetoric functions for social movements. However, critics such as Smith and Andrews claim that this is identical to the historical perspective because complete accounts of movement discourse needed for the perspective is only available for movements that have concluded (R. Smith 290; J. Andrews, “History” 274).

Members of the communication discipline have also utilized critical methodologies to study social movements. The critical rhetoric genre was facilitated by

criticism of the lack of social change that occurred in traditional methods such as Neo-Aristotelian criticism. Barbara Biesecker advances that “rhetorical studies is a discipline animated by a profound utopian yearning...its practitioners operate out of the firm conviction that things can change, be otherwise different—in fact better—provided that human beings intervene symbolically in a history that is of their own making” (351).

One central issue in which all the varying perspectives of study have focused on is the role of discourse in social movement mobilization. Griffin writes that movements begin when “some pivotal individual or group – suffering attitudes of alienation in a given social system, and drawn...by the impious dream of a mythic Order – enacts, gives voice to, a No” (“Dramatistic” 462). Griffin provides further support for this analysis in his research of social movements utilizing a Burkeian lens. He argues that movements were analogous to religious dramas. Each typically and symbolically contained a conflict, a killing of the victim, and reaching for salvation or the perfect order (“Dramatistic” 456). Applicable to this analysis, Brenda Hancock utilizes Griffin’s Burkeian approach to describe women’s liberation discourse. Hancock argues that through the rejection of a male-dominated social structure, women are allowed to release their frustration with the status quo and to redefine themselves in contrast to the masculine traits they challenged. She states that “verbal killing of the victim, men, has allowed women to discover strengths within themselves, and to unite in a strong and separate revolutionary movement (265).

Other aspects of rhetoric are key to a social movement’s mobilization. Smith and Windes, in their 1976 study, argue that one characteristic that makes the rhetorical

situation of movements unique is their incorporation of exigencies of mobilization (“Rhetoric” 1). The very essence of movement mobilization is dependent upon discourse to establish support for a concerted goal to reach a shared purpose of societal change. Furthermore, ideology serves to be a primary characteristic of mobilization. Andrew King concludes that ideology is crucial because it mobilizes individuals through processes of orientation, legitimacy, and mission. First, orientation advances the ideology that serves as an identifying force for a collective as they evaluate the meaning of actions and events. Second, ideology perpetuates legitimacy that can allow members to accept power arrangement and hierarchies within the group. Finally, ideology creates mission that affirms and supports group goals and purposes (“Power” 151). King also states that mobilization of resources is imperative for a group to gain and maintain power (“Power” 147).

One of the primary features of mobilization in a social movement analysis, and of this research, is the awareness that an individual is part of a group that shares a particular concern (Freeman and Johnson 2). Individuals can either bring that consciousness to the movement or the movement can create the consciousness. Mobilization of a social movement can occur through consciousness-raising which influences participants to sacrifice their personal well-being for the cause of the group (Hirsch, “Sacrifice” 47). Consciousness-raising typically occurs in loosely structured, face-to-face settings that are absent from persons of power (Hirsch, “Sacrifice” 36). Hirsch cites the Columbia University student protest over investment of university stock in companies doing business in South Africa as an example of an informal attempt at consciousness-raising

(“Sacrifice” 50). The consciousness-raising performed by the Coalition for a Free South Africa occurred in small group settings that included teach-ins, forums, and dormitory discussion sessions (Hirsch, “Sacrifice” 51). The term consciousness-raising was used by the women’s movement to describe the sharing of experiences and the search “for causes of their frustrated sense of inferiority, indeed of exploitation” (Hancock 265).

The role of crisis certainly dovetails with consciousness-raising. A crisis can serve to solidify and mobilize discontent (Freeman 22). For example, crisis occurred to spark the civil rights movement in Montgomery, Alabama when Rosa Parks refused to give her seat on a public bus to a white man (Freeman 21). Many of the anti-war protests that occurred were mobilized due to a large outcry against a military conflict (Gustainis and Hahn 203). This crisis can also be a constructed reality that the social movement can formulate internally, often through a creation of an enemy. Griffin states that the construction of an enemy or the presence of a victim is important in a social movement’s development (“Dramatistic” 464). Hancock states that construction of an enemy as a crisis point was crucial to the facilitation of the women’s liberation movement. Ironically, it was the construction of the enemy as the white man and capitalism that served to splinter the movement into various branches and organizations (265).

Aside from mobilization, another direction of social movement research focuses on the role that rhetoric plays in the completion of the movement’s goals. The goals of the movement are articulated and identified through the group’s rhetoric (Cathcart, “Movements” 234; Smith and Windes, “Innovational” 140). Lucas argues that the success of a social movement ultimately rests on its’ ability to challenge status quo

thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs in a persuasive fashion (261). Blumer provides further analysis on the importance of discourse in the success of a movement by stating that “the essential process of a movement is one in which attention has to be gained, interests awakened, grievances exploited, ideas implanted, doubts dispelled, feelings aroused, new objects created, and new perspectives developed” (“Social” 148).

There have been numerous criticisms of the current development of a rhetorical methodology for social movements. Zarefsky criticizes Cathcart’s suggestion that movements are unique rhetorical situations that are different from other rhetorical events. Zarefsky claims that the dialectic that is defined by Cathcart is not isolated in exchanges between institutions and “uninstitutionalized collectivities” (246). Griffin also questions Cathcart’s claim that dialectical enjoinderment is an absolute for social movements. To claim that movements do not occur until crisis erupts narrows what can be included in the definition of social movements (“On” 231). Wilkinson argues that Cathcart’s work ends where it actually should begin. He believes that Cathcart ignores the methodological approach that Griffin employs in his later research and is too hasty to criticize sociological and historical definitions of social movements (91).

According to Cathcart, movements maintain “strategic [rhetorical] forms that bring identification of the individual with the movement” (“Defining” 268). Cathcart further advances rhetoric’s place in social movements through the explanation of dialectical enjoinderment in the moral arena. The identification of a social movement is not only seen in its rhetoric, but also in the rhetorical response from individuals and institutions outside of the movement. These responses create the perception of the

movement's existence and can often result in conflict between the movement's members and those outside the movement (Cathcart, "Defining" 270). Cathcart argues that previous movement research done by Simons, Hahn, and Gonchar fails because of their reliance on a social science approach. Cathcart laments that social scientists study movements by contrasting individual behavior with the collective behavior, instead of contrasting collective behaviors with larger societal behaviors. It is only through the latter approach, argues Cathcart, that movements can be defined (Cathcart, "A Confrontation" 86).

To further expand on Cathcart's explanation of social movements, it is important to note the various forms that responses outside of the movement can take. First, the responses can take the form of dialectical tension as defined by Cathcart. Often times, these responses are from those institutions from which the social movement seeks to challenge. Several examples of this form of tension are available in the literature. Roberta Ann Johnson, in her work on the social mobilization surrounding the American with Disabilities Act, describes conflict that existed between the disabled movement and government agencies, like the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (27). Theodore Windt's analysis of the 1964 student protests at the University of California at Berkeley argues that the University's administration effectively blunted the effect of the protests through various rhetorical strategies, such as shifting discourse away from the central issues and creating demeaning political names for the protestors (248). King defines the specific rhetorical strategies employed by the University of California at

Berkeley as administrative rhetoric, discursive strategies used to protect the institution from perceived threats of the authority being undermined (“The Rhetoric” 132).

The media can also be an institution that can employ discursive strategies to block this effectiveness of a movement and create a dialectical tension. Abigail Halcli details the negative coverage the media created to various protests used by the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). Specifically, Halcli details the organization’s “Stop the Church” demonstration in New York City. As a response to recent church policies against safer sex education, the group staged a die-in at St. Patrick’s Cathedral during Sunday mass. Condoms were tossed in the air and protestors chained themselves to the pews. The negative media coverage after the event of ACT UP is one of the reasons many gay and lesbian advocates turned their backs on the organization (145). Another example of how the media’s rhetorical strategies can create conflict with a social movement is the media’s interaction with the pro-life group, Operation Rescue. Originally, the media’s discourse and coverage aided the organization in its’ mobilization attempts. Five-second media bytes depicted the organization singing patriotic songs and participating in “freedom” sit-ins. The media compared the movement to the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Johnson 248). However, when public opinion started to shift to opposition of Operation Rescue, the media followed. The media focused on conflicts that would erupt during protests and often editorialized about the group’s violent tactics. This shift in the media’s coverage created several rhetorical conflicts between the organization and the media venues. Many Operation Rescue leaders feel that this new wave of negative media attention is the primary reason their membership numbers fell (Johnson

250). The media depicted members of the women's liberation movement as extremely radical by coining such phrases as "bra-burners" (Hancock 271).

Aside from dialectical tension, a second rhetorical response that can be used by those outside the movement is the facilitation of countermovements. Created by private citizens or public authority figures (Lucas 265), countermovements can be defined as "those groups that seek to undermine changes achieved by social movements" (Johnson 241). In one of his later essays, Griffin embraces the importance of countermovements in social movement study by claiming that the countermovement is "central to the dialectical development of a movement's rhetoric" ("On" 226). It is often reported in the literature that social movements tend to challenge the order of those higher on the social hierarchy and countermovements tend to preempt changes from below (Johnson 241; Mottl 621). Although countermovements started drastically emerging since the 1970s, minimal research has been completed (Johnson 242; Mottl 620; Lo 107). Lucas laments that "the rhetoric of countermovement advocates is a subject that merits serious inquiry in and of itself. We need to learn more about the symbolic processes of social control, and investigating countermovement rhetoric in defense of established ideas and institutions is one route to such learning" (265).

There has been some research completed, however, which can allow scholars to identify some of the varying strategic determinants between social movements and countermovements. In her analysis of Operation Rescue as a countermovement to the Pro-Choice movement, Johnson draws two primary distinctions. First, countermovements typically have better access to more resources since the individuals

that comprise the group are usually protecting institutionalized socioeconomic interests. Second, countermovements often coopt successful rhetorical strategies employed by social movements to mobilize support. However, the countermovement will often redefine the goals to encompass their opposing ideological beliefs (242).

Countermovements can serve as facilitators and barriers to the social movement they are challenging. The impact of countermovements on social movements can be a limitation in the ultimate effect that the social movement has. Countermovements can mobilize new movements and formulate new institutions, interest groups, and procedures that can block the success of the original movement (Freeman and Johnson ix). Often times, the creation of countermovements can be positive for the social movement. Griffin states that the creation of the countermovement is often vital to the social movement's success since it provides the necessary dialectic, as well as creating a victim to serve as a target for a rhetorical response ("Dramatistic" 464). It can serve to unify the movement through a battle with the opposition. When movements square off against countermovements, each sparks a propaganda war using the threat of one to mobilize the other (Gerlach 91). Hancock cites the New Left men's countermovement as an example of one that provides strength to the original movement. Although the countermovement's intent was to depict the women's liberation movement as radical and unnecessary, the tactics employed by the New Left men made it easier for the women's liberation movement to prove that all men are the enemy (Hancock 271).

A third and final rhetorical response to social movements by those outside the organization is government repression and cooptation. King argues that government

programs, however ineffective, devastate the immediacy of collective rhetoric. The government traditionally establishes programs and agencies in order to curb a potential threat it perceives (“The Rhetoric” 132). Frederick Miller concludes that repressive strategies, such as indicting members on criminal charges, using techniques to spy on organizations, and leaking false information about the group, are often deemed as legitimate tools by the government to exert control over social movements (305). Such repression and cooptation tactics can be seen in research on various social movement organizations, such as the Students for a Democratic Society, the Black Panthers, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (F. Miller 304; McAdam 341; Stoper 363).

One area that the literature in external responses fails to explain is the formation and impact of splinter movements or organizations. These can often be individuals with very similar purposes and ideals, but who disagree about the mechanisms through which to achieve those goals, which is at the heart of this analysis. Numerous examples can be found in the history of social movements. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s had several organizations, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Southern Christian Leadership Council (Freeman 9). Each of these organizations had similar goals they wanted to advance, but disagreed over the tactics and discursive strategies that should be employed. The women’s movement that emerged in the same decade also is an example. Many scholars point to the liberal and the radical branches of the women’s movement. The liberal organizations usually were highly organized, formal groups that used legal means to gain equality rights. In contrast, the

radical organizations pursued societal transformation through non-governmental means and often relied on individual consciousness-raising (Taylor and Whittier 172). Another example can be found in the gay rights' movement. The leader of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, Larry Kramer, was originally a member of the Gay Men's Health Crisis group that focused on raising funds for research for the HIV virus and educating the gay community. However, Kramer left to form ACT UP due to his belief that the GMHC was a bureaucratic organization that only would bow to governmental pressures (Halcli 139). Although these organizations had many of the same ideological goals, their strategies and tactics often differed. It is important that further study on these splinter groups be introduced, because often times these groups serve as criticisms and challenges to one another.

Such divisions in a social movement is also evident in the evolution and the current state of the women's movement, which is a prerequisite to understanding the methodology used for this research. A brief history of the women's movement is necessary here to lay the foundation for the following chapter that focuses on black feminist epistemologies. Susan Faludi argues that the history of the women's movement is analogous to a corkscrew that is tilted to one side – it moves closer to the line of freedom over time but can never reach its goal. Each revolution of the women's movement advances the belief that this is the revolution that will free women from the cycle of oppression, but falls short of the goal each time (46).

Most historians chart the beginning of the women's movement at the first organized union of women at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, where suffragists

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and others argued for the right to vote and other liberties, such as voluntary motherhood and property rights (P. Collins 39; Guy-Sheftall, "Preface" xiii). The idea for the convention began when five female delegates were denied seating at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London (D. Miller 156). At the Seneca Falls Convention, Stanton presented the "Declaration of Rights and Sentiments," a reworking of the original Declaration of Independence to include women (Walter H1). This original uniting of women actually grew out of the abolition movement and the temperance movement, which was seen as a way to stop drunken husbands from beating their wives (Walter H1).

One of the first schisms noted in the women's movement was the controversy surrounding the fifteenth amendment, which gave black men the right to vote. At an Equal Rights Association meeting in 1869, Frederick Douglass, an important voice in the abolition movement and the women's movement, argued that, with the end of the Civil War, it was imperative that focus be placed on race matters over gender matters. Douglass argued that continuing the linkage between women's suffrage and black suffrage would reduce the prospects for securing the right to vote for black men (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 5). This split the collection of men and women that were arguing for both suffrages, especially black women. While most black women supported Douglass, some refused to prioritize black suffrage. Sojourner Truth believed that if black men received the vote, they would dominate black women (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 6). Other divisions in the movement occurred as well. For example,

Stanton was ousted from the movement she helped create because of her challenges to male-centered religion (English M8).

Following the split in the women's movement over black suffrage, Stanton and Anthony created the National Women Suffrage Association because of the betrayal they felt from the male leaders who opted to focus on black suffrage (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 6). The split also saw an increase of women's clubs along racial lines. Women's clubs focused on self- and community improvement, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs was created in 1890 to serve as an umbrella foundation for women's clubs nationwide (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 7). However, these women's clubs barred women of color from their membership, furthering the split between white and black suffragists. Black women's clubs emerged and focused on a different agenda, primarily defending black womanhood, mobilizing the masses, and increasing the quality of their family life (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 7). Toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, the women's movement continued to face a barrage of obstacles, such as religious leaders, academics, and press pundits, which stifled their membership. Feminists were blamed for the climbing divorce rates and the overall breakdown of the family. State legislatures responded with a vast array of laws restricting divorce and contraception usage (Faludi 49).

However, a few years later into the twentieth century, women began to mobilize again for the right to vote (Faludi 49). This caused further ideological splits between white and black women. Although black women felt the right to vote was important, many black women were focused on employment disparities that existed. Black women

were denied union membership and adequate wages. Although many black women were important to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, many black women felt that the mobilization of women had been too narrowly focused on the white women's agenda (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 9).

With the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, the peak of the first wave of the women's movement was concluded. The years that followed saw women, both black and white, focus on issues of birth control, employment, and being mothers that worked outside of the home during times of war (Faludi 52). Although similar agendas were advanced, white and black women maintained different rationales for supporting them and faced different obstacles in fighting for them. For example, Margaret Sanger led the fight for all women to receive better birth control options. However, black women faced unique intraracial barriers from black organizations that feared birth control would lead to racial extinction and that black women had unique roles as mothers in the black community (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 12). On the employment front, black female domestic workers were forced to challenge both the government's indifference to their economic exploitation in the job market and the hostility and discrimination they faced from employment agencies (James 64).

It was not until the 1960s that the second wave of the women's movement moved to the forefront and the divisiveness between women along racial lines became more evident. The fight for women's liberation peaked against a backdrop of the civil rights movement and the rise of black nationalism. Women united over concerns on issues such as pay equity, employment discrimination, abortion, and gender-based violence (Mann

C11; Faludi 55; Staggenborg 115; V. Smith 7). Scholars point to ideological divisions that started occurring in the women's movement in the late 1960s. The women's movement of this era is often depicted in two fractures: a liberal branch that focused on women's rights and a radical branch that was concerned with women's liberation (Taylor and Whittier 172). The liberal branch, the dominant feminist perspective, was primarily composed of national-level formal organizations, such as the National Organization for Women. This sector used legal measures to pursue equal rights (Taylor and Whittier 172). This perspective is often criticized for its exclusion of the black woman's voice. This perspective tends to look at sexism as separate from other forms of oppression, such as racism and classism (Stanback 29). The radical branch contained more linkages to the civil rights movement and consisted of more local, autonomous groups that sought fundamental change in patriarchal structures (Taylor and Whittier 172). However, both factions grew increasingly divisive over issues of race, capitalism and sexuality (Taylor and Whittier 173). Black feminist thought is often placed in the radical category by scholars. However, black feminism is also divided by the radical and liberal schism (James 81).

During this era, black women found themselves in a unique position in the fight for civil rights and women's liberation. Many black women formulated feminist beliefs out of nationalist ideology or antiracist organizations (James 75). However, black women often faced sexism in many civil rights organizations. Women were often omitted from leadership positions and speaking engagements (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 14). Many black women initially sought membership in the more radical

feminist groups, finding groups such as the National Organization of Women hostile to issues of race and lesbianism (Taylor and Whittier 173). However, disputes involving how to forward change on issues of race and sexuality ultimately proved fatalistic to the radical branch of the women's movement as well (Taylor and Whittier 174).

Not finding comfort in the civil rights movement or the women's movement, many black women sought a place in black women's organizations. Francis Beale writes that "any white group that does not have an anti-imperialist and antiracist ideology has absolutely nothing in common with the black woman's struggle" (153). In 1973, the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) was created (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 15). Its' original purpose was to remind the black liberation movement that "there can't be liberation for half of the race" (Schneir 171). Many women also objected to the women's movement being seen as white and involvement in that group was seen as being disloyal to their race (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 15; "How" 32). The NBFO was one of the first explicitly black feminist organizations who were concerned with the elimination of sexism, racism, and heterosexism (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 15). A year after its' inception, the Boston chapter of NBFO became an independent organization and renamed themselves the Combahee River Collective after Harriet Tubman's campaign in South Carolina that freed 800 slaves ("How" 32; Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 15).

Since the formation of independent black feminist organizations, a surge of black feminist authors have published literary works, such as Audre Lorde, Barbara Christian, Angela Davis, and bell hooks. The 1990s have witnessed a massive increase in the

formation of black feminist epistemologies with works by Patricia Collins and Toni Cade being infiltrated into mainstream feminism. The Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings “sparked the most profound intraracial politics that the modern African American community had ever experienced” (Guy-Sheftall, “Introduction” 19; V. Smith 124). This event sparked massive public dialogue among black women and resulted in new organizations for black women, such as the African American Women in Defense of Ourselves (Guy-Sheftall, “Introduction” 20).

Many black women continued to be alienated by the mainstream women’s movement and even reject the label “feminist” (Guy-Sheftall, “Introduction” 19). It is still apparent that the agenda of the women’s movement is concentrated on issues springing from the white woman’s experience. Many still argue that feminist thought suffers from “gender myopia” and still fails to include approaches that challenge oppressions based on gender, race, and sexuality (James 178). The following chapter will discuss in more detail the epistemological theories and standpoints behind black feminist thought.

CHAPTER III

BLACK FEMINIST THEORY

Kesho Yvonne Scott writes that “black women both shape the world and are shaped by it. They come to feminist theory and practice out of the oppression they experience as people who are poor and black and women...outside traditional white feminine roles, white racial institutions, and white feminist cultural theory” (Guy-Sheftall, “Introduction” 1). The study of black women’s oppression is not new. Black feminist thought was found in organizations that sought to free northern women of color in the early 1800s. Black women had to formulate their own organizations because leadership was difficult to obtain when black males were members of the same group (Guy-Sheftall, “Introduction” 3). Maria Miller Stewart first recognized the erasure of black women in a pamphlet she published in 1831, where she asked “How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?” (P. Collins 1). Stewart challenged all women of color to develop their education, oppose submission to men, and to participate in community building (Guy-Sheftall, “Introduction” 25). Some of the same guiding principles found in the early works of Stewart and other black women leaders, such as Anna Julia Cooper and Sojourner Truth, continue to be articulated in contemporary black feminist writings. The dialectic of activism and oppression, the tension between the suppression of the women

of color's voice and their activism against the backdrop of the oppression, is at the core of the politics of U.S. black feminist thought (P. Collins 3). Audre Lorde writes:

Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface. Black women have particular and legitimate issues which affect our lives as [B]lack women, and addressing those issues does not make us any less [B]lack. To attempt to open dialogue between [B]lack women and [B]lack men by attacking [B]lack feminists seems short-sighted and self-defeating...Black feminists speak as women because we are women and do not need others to speak for us. (*Sister* 60)

The function of this chapter is to detail the theories that guide black feminist thought. It will also suggest how black feminism both embraces and criticizes some fundamental tenets of the mainstream women's movement. The chapter will define concepts of intersectionality, the matrix of domination, essentialism, white solipism, and identity politics. This chapter will also discuss differences that exist in black feminist agenda building that distinguish it from the traditionally white, elite feminist movement. These theories and practices will provide the methodology that will be used to critique Eleanor Smeal's address in Chapter Four.

Black women, since the Diaspora to the United States began, have faced oppressions from many institutions based on a multitude of characteristics. Patricia Hill Collins outlines three interlocking dimensions that have encompassed the oppression of the African-American woman. First, Collins points to the exploitation of black women's labor intrinsic to capitalism as the economic dimension of oppression (4). This

exploitation is evident, not only in the slavery era, but in the “slave marts” in the first half of the twentieth century where black female domestic workers were sold to the highest white male bidder, and in the considerable pay inequities that exist today (James 62, 69). The second dimension of oppression felt by black women is found within the political sphere that has denied them privileges that are routinely extended to white male citizens (P. Collins 4). Pauli Murray refers to the lack of inclusion of the black women who were important to the civil rights struggle in history textbooks (188). Black women have often been denied equitable access to education and were sent to underfunded, segregated schools in the South (Mullings 5). The third and final dimension of oppression that Collins suggests is one of ideology. Since the slave era, controlling images of the black woman have guided societal treatment of them. Ironically, black women are perceived as being sexually promiscuous as well as asexual. Black women are stereotyped as aberrational sexual beings (James 140) while simultaneously being seen as unfit or not attractive enough to be seduced (Jordan 407). This ideological dimension has an incredible impact on black victims of sexual assault who are not defined as rape victims because they either asked for it or the belief that no man (especially a white one) would want to have sex with her (V. Smith 8). Black women are also associated with images such as jezebels, Aunt Jemimas, and mammies (P. Collins 5). These three dimensions of oppression -- economic, political, and ideological -- serve as an effective web of social control in order to keep black women in an inferior and invisible place.

Black feminisms have always been guided by the premise that race and gender are mutually dependent, intersecting cultural constructions (V. Smith xiii). The argument

that black women confront both a “woman question and a race problem” dates back to a late nineteenth-century writing by Anna Julia Cooper and still stands at the core of black feminist writing today (Guy-Sheftall, “Introduction” 1). Frances Beale originally coined the term “double jeopardy” to describe the simultaneous oppressions that black women faced because of race and gender (146; Stanback 28).

Deborah King offers an expanded view of discrimination by including class oppression that uniquely and disproportionately affects black women and defines oppression as “multiple jeopardy” (295). Although Beale’s writings often detailed economic exploitation of the black woman, King and others argue that the term “double jeopardy” was too limited by its implied image of a dualistic structure. King also notes that sexuality becomes another form of oppression that black lesbian women can face and is excluded by concepts of double or triple jeopardy (297). King suggests that utilizing the modifier of “multiple” is inclusive of several oppressions, as well as the relationships between those oppressions. The term multiple implies that oppression for a black woman can be racism multiplied by classism multiplied by sexism (D. King 297). She points to the sexual exploitation of the slave woman as an example of this interconnected relationship. Black female slaves often suffered the same physical punishments and labor that black male slaves endured. However, female slaves were also exposed to abuses that were only applicable to women (D. King 297; Murray 187). Angela Davis writes that “if the most violent punishments of men consisted in floggings and mutilations, women were flogged and mutilated, as well as raped” (7). The childbearing ability of the black slave woman actually enhanced the capital of the slave-based economy that points to an

economic exploitation of oppression. King also notes this example of multiple jeopardy is distinguishable from the sexual exploitation white women face. The sexual exploitation of the black slave woman could only have occurred in relation to racist and classist forms of domination and oppression (D. King 297).

Audre Lorde argues that black feminists lack a language they can utilize to describe the forms of oppression they face. This inability to linguistically depict their oppression is another barrier to transformative change (*Sister* 43). The debate over the term “multiple jeopardy” is a prime example. Many black feminists do not believe the term “multiple jeopardy” is broad enough nor descriptive enough to define the oppression that women of color face. The term “intersectionality” has been advanced by legal scholars such as Kimberle Crenshaw, Christi Cunningham, and Laura Padilla, as a more flexible, broad term that can more accurately articulate oppression faced by women of color. Phrases such as “double jeopardy” and “multiple jeopardy” can encompass the number of oppressions women of color face, but not the relationship between those oppressions. Mary Powell gives the example that black women would have Asian men included in statistics on racial discrimination and white women in statistics on gender discrimination (413). The phrase intersectionality encompasses the relationship between and amongst the oppressions (Cunningham 441; Arriola 103; Bowman 517; Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing” 139; Eaton 183; Trillo 16; Gunning 143; Halley 93). Kimberle Crenshaw writes that women of color:

by virtue of our race and gender are situated within at least two systems of subordination: racism and sexism...our experiences of racism are

shaped by gender and our experiences of sexism are shaped by our race...this dual vulnerability does not simply mean our burdens are doubled but instead, that the dynamics of racism and sexism intersect in our lives to create experiences that are sometimes unique to us.

(“Race” 1467, 1470)

The presence of each type of oppression in the lives of black women ultimately affects the experience of all the others. For example, when black women experience sexism, their experience in racism differs in ways from that of black men (Stanback 29).

With intersectionality as their foundation, many scholars have also formulated theories concerning race-sex analogies. Race-sex analogies date back to first wave feminists, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton stated in 1860 that “prejudice against color, of which we hear so much, is no stronger than that of sex” (D. King 295). Many authors advance that comparisons of discrimination based on one form of oppression to another form of discrimination uniquely marginalizes individuals who face multiple forms of oppression. Trina Grillo and Stephanie Wildman argue that to analogize between two different oppressions is to set up a false construction of reality in which an individual believes he/she can understand the experiences of another (397). For example, a white woman who claims that sexism is as detrimental as racism is creating parallels that allow her to inadvertently believe she knows what it is like to be of an oppressed race. Another harm that is advanced in the creation of the sex-race analogy is that it perpetuates racial domination by allowing whites to reclaim the center by shifting the focus of racial oppression through white privilege (Grillo and Wildman 398). It allows individuals

(specifically white women) to filter the racism debate through the dominant lens of whiteness. Furthermore, the sex-race analogy assumes that sex and race are distinct categories in which the impact can be neatly separated from the other (Grillo and Wildman 399). The experiences of women of color are, therefore, eliminated. King states that it is “precisely those differences between blacks and women, between black men and black women, between black women and white women, that are crucial to understanding the nature of black womanhood” (296).

Collins argues that an intersectional paradigm is important to further the understanding of the multiple forms of oppression that can exist. First, this paradigm can spark new interpretations of black women’s experiences (227). An intersectional approach can shed new light on various experiences unique to women of color, such as confinement to domestic work, sexual politics of black women, and motherhood (P. Collins 227). Crenshaw argues that an intersectional approach can be used to deconstruct rigid categories that are often used to categorize identities of individuals (“Mapping” 1241). Second, this paradigm can stimulate new thought on how domination is organized. Collins uses the phrase “matrix of domination” to describe the overall social organization from which “intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained” (228).

A lack of an intersectional approach can commonly be seen in the judicial system when women of color file discrimination claims. The plaintiff’s identity becomes whatever category she/he files the claim under. In many circumstances, the courts have only allowed for individuals to file discrimination suits on the basis of one protected class. The judicial system set a precedent in *Jeffries v. Harris County Community Action*

Association (1980), by stating that the legal system would not recognize the synergy of a woman of color's claim. At most, the discrimination would be viewed as racism + sexism, not that the plaintiff was discriminated because she was a woman of color (Cunningham 471). Out of the *Jeffries* decision, the courts as an answer to intersectionality introduced the "sex-plus" doctrine. Many courts have used the "sex-plus doctrine" in Title VII cases when discrimination has occurred against a particular subclass of women (Cunningham 473).

Critics do exist, however, in the black feminist movement that reject the ideology of using categories that intersectionality is based on, which is also known as identity politics. Cunningham argues that the theory of wholism should be embraced instead. She defines wholism as the "theory that identity, when subjective and empowered, is unified rather than multiple or splintered" (442). Wholism works from a group perspective as being the essence of discrimination. Abandoning the constructs of intersectionality, wholism asserts that the individual is self-defined, not that the individual is a totality of pre-constructed identities. Separation of characteristics, which is essential to intersectionality, is both a social and a false construction (Cunningham 500) under the wholism paradigm.

The lack of an intersectional approach is one of the fundamental criticisms that black feminist thought has of the mainstream women's movement. The women's movement has primarily focused on challenging the organization of power strictly around sexual divisions (Joseph and Lewis 7). Ironically, the women's movement often wondered why more women of color and Third World women did not get involved in the

cause (Joseph and Lewis 7). Black feminism tries to surpass the one-dimensional approach that most liberation struggles invoke, such as focusing on patriarchy or white supremacy, homophobia or capitalism (James 43). Joy James states that black feminism “highlights the limitations of such thinking while exploring the intersections of oppression and freedom...[it will] interpret and dissect, describe and agitate within American society” (42).

From this criticism of intersectionality, many black women were also concerned that the women’s movement and feminist theory essentialized the experiences of women. Angela Harris defines essentialism as “the notion that a unitary, essential women’s experience can be isolated and described independently of race, class, sexual orientation, and other realities of experience” (585). Since the start of the feminist movement, women of color have been arguing that their unique experiences challenge the very notion of a unitary woman’s experience (Harris 586). Dating back to Sojourner Truth’s historical 1851 speech, where she stated that she was still a woman despite having ploughed, planted, and worked as hard as a man, black women leaders have criticized leaders of the suffrage movement for not embracing issues of racial oppression (Harris 586).

Elizabeth Spelman states that five concepts facilitate gender essentialistic thought: women can be talked about “as women”, women are oppressed “as women”, gender can be isolated from other forms of oppression, women’s situation can be contrasted to men’s, and parallels can be drawn between men and women and relations of other oppressor/oppressed groups (165). Harris argues that this form of thought reduces

oppression to addition problems: “racism + sexism = straight black women’s experience” or “racism + sexism + homophobia = black lesbian experiences” (588). This fragmented approach to oppression allows for experiences to be constructed that are supposedly representative of the entirety of the group that faces an isolated oppression. Harris states that the impact of essentialism, despite the intent of the perspective, is the continuation of marginalized voices (584).

Out of the essentialism debate comes the concept of white solipism. Adrienne Rich defines white solipism as the “tendency to think, imagine, and speak as if whiteness described the world” (299). Rich argues that a majority of white feminist ideology concerning racism has been completed “under a massive burden of guilt feelings and false consciousness” (281). These guilt feelings are what creates solipism, which causes a preoccupation with one’s own feelings and experiences that prevents connection with experiences of others (Singleton 12). It is the ignorance of differences that have kept women apart from one another. Carrie Singleton believes that, in large part, white women are the ones ignorant of Black women’s culture (15).

Essentialism within the woman’s movement ultimately shapes activism and agenda building. By viewing all sexism as an isolated, unitary experience, white women in leadership positions have molded agendas for mainstream movement organizations under the belief that they are incorporating the totality of women’s experiences. However, black feminists have exposed several agenda items within the movement that do not include women of color. It is important to note that women of color and white women do share many common concerns about their status and rights within the legal

system, sexual victimization, and their encounters with discrimination (D. King 303). However, invisibility and marginalization often describes the relationship women of color have to the methods used by the mainstream women's movement to advance these common goals. King states that, although commonality is often asserted in the women's movement, this belief often "denies the other structured inequalities of race, class, religion, and nationality, as well as denying the diverse cultural heritages that affect the lives of many women" (303). It is crucial that differences are recognized and embraced when white and black women mobilize around an agenda issue (Joseph and Lewis 40). Unfortunately, this does not often occur and has led to splits within the movement.

One agenda issue that divides black and white women in the mainstream women's movement involves concerns of employment (Joseph and Lewis 20). Mainstream feminists often fail to ask questions of particular importance to the women that are the least advantaged, those that are laboring under multiple forms of oppression (Kitay 38). Lorde reports that black women are the lowest paid group in the nation (*Sister* 60). Black women also are disproportionately relegated to more traditional female jobs, such as domestic work, secretarial employment, and nursing (Faludi 367). Although both factions realize that equity in the workplace is an important issue, black and white women have different experiences and ask for different solutions. The mainstream women's movement often centralizes its' employment agenda around issues of fair pay and hiring/promotion discrimination (Faludi xv). Black women, on the other hand, question the employment that society has bound them to. Laborious jobs, which are often characterized as being unfit for women, are not questioned when held by women of color

(Joseph and Lewis 27). Another differential is that the mainstream women's movement fight for employment equities entirely lies in an unquestioned capitalistic system (Joseph and Lewis 35). Beale argues that the system of capitalism ultimately reduces women of color to a life of enslavement (149). Ironically, women's entry into the labor market and the expanded opportunity for women to access material resources has coincided with the increased impoverishment of many women, especially those of a minority race (Kittay 38). During the years of 1979 and 1994, the earnings gap between fully employed men and women decreased. In the same period, women of color were twice as likely to experience unemployment as their white female counterparts (Herz and Wootton 45). White women also often benefit from the menial labor that the capitalist system affords many women of color (Fittay 39). This can be traced back to the Depression era, which increased the accessibility of women of color as domestic servants to middle- and upper class white women (James 63). It has also been documented that women of color have more difficulties finding representation in labor unions (Beale 150; Murray 195). Finally, white feminists have long ignored the issue of welfare reform. Black feminists argue that issues of welfare and dependency must be redefined by white feminists as an issue that should be the foundation of coalition building between elite women and women who are the most vulnerable (Kitay 40).

Health care is also a divisive agenda issue that splits the mainstream women's movement along racial lines (Joseph and Lewis 20). The issue of abortion is often a rallying cry for mobilization (Faludi xv). Although both black and white feminists view abortion as a key issue, black women have more at stake. Proportionately, black women

suffered more from abusive and illegal abortions (Joseph and Lewis 40). Shirley Chisolm argues that poor, black women are more often affected by little knowledge of contraceptive use and often are subjected to less-qualified doctors (395). Additionally, women of color often have the added burden of raising their unborn child in an impoverished home if they choose to give birth, which compounds the abortion question (Chisolm 395). Women of color argue that, although the issue of abortion is important, it is only a surface argument that black women face in reproductive choices. Although they have diminished in number over the past twenty years, black women faced the challenge about whether they can even get pregnant through sterilization clinics. In the 1960s, sterilization clinics were set up in minority-rich areas to promote sterilization options for women of color in an attempt to control the number of children being born into poverty-stricken homes (Beale 151). Many black women have been forced to accept the sterilization option in order to receive government assistance (Beale 152).

Black women also face greater disparities than white women do in the facilitation of health care from doctors and hospitals. Black children face greater mortality rates than white children. Black women face higher rates of death in emergency rooms and clinics due to inadequate facilities, doctors, and neglect (Joseph and Lewis 40). The majority of women who have AIDS are black women (James 119). Evelyn Hammonds argues that the media and the government ignore the plight of AIDS amongst black women (436). When the disease was understood to no longer be isolated in the gay community, whites received most of the attention. When black women were discussed, they are often included in the drug abuser category or as bad mothers who passed AIDS onto their

children (Hammonds 436). The white women's battle with the AIDS crisis entails battling media suggestions that women with AIDS need to make more moral choices; black women fought just to be recognized as a victim (Faludi 80). Unlike white women, black women can not afford to devote a great deal of energy to the abortion question when they face a lack of equity in comprehensive health care.

Sexual objectification and violence is a third agenda item that divides white and black feminists. The belief that sexuality and all the issues surrounding it was political in nature served as the impetus for the modern day women's movement (Joseph and Lewis 5; Smith 6). The mainstream women's movement has focused on rape and battering prevention by calling for stricter legislation and raising money for programs and shelters (Faludi xiv; Joseph and Lewis 64). However, women of color have to battle issues of sexuality and sexual violence differently than white women because they are often characterized as non-females (Joseph and Lewis 27). Identification with white women on the issue of sexual violence is difficult since women of color tend to be the "most vulnerable and least visible victims of rape" (V. Smith 8). White feminists also tended to ignore issues of interracial rape, especially when the rapist was white and the victim was black (Giddings 420). Compounding the problem, women of color are perceived by the American psyche in a conflictual manner. Blacks are often characterized as being extremely sexual (James 127; Marshall 11). However, black women are often not deemed feminine enough to have sex with, which makes it difficult for society to accept black women as victims of sexual violence, especially by a white male (Joseph and Lewis 27). Anneka Marshall writes that "the contradictory sexualized

figures of blacks was linked to genitalia that were defined as complete yet damaged, diseased yet attractive, poisoning yet potent...Black female genitalia represented sexual pathology, corruption and death (8).” Sander Gilman argues that fear and curiosity of black difference guaranteed that women of color were despised yet sexually exploited. Sexual relations with black women are often regarded simultaneously as shameful and erotic, which led to the imaging of black women as prostitutes (Gilman 10).

These image creations of black women can also be seen in issues of rape. Jennifer Wriggins suggests that rape laws were originally constructed to protect elite white men and that differentials in sentencing between black and white rapists demonstrates that the laws are used to control black men instead of protection for women (105). The criminal justice system treats the rape of black woman by either a black or white man is treated less seriously than a rape of a white woman by the criminal justice system (Smith 6). Wriggins reports that sentences for rapists of white women have always been more severe than for those convicted of raping black women. Between 1936 and 1964, thirty-six percent of black males convicted of raping a white woman were executed. In contrast, only two percent of all rapists involved in other racial combinations during the same time period were executed (Wriggins 106). Joseph and Lewis report similar discrepancies in sentence lengths for rapists of black women and white women still exist today (27). One factor in this discrepancy is that black women are often depicted as being temptresses (Marshall 18). The Sapphire stereotype, coined by bell hooks, depicts the image of black women as being assertive, tough, and evil in relation to sexual politics (*Ain't* 85). Hooks argues that white men, even from the days of slavery, could easily

justify their economic and sexual exploitation of black women by arguing that they possessed evil qualities (*Ain't* 85). Economic exploitation is a second factor in the unequal treatment of black women as rape victims. Valerie Smith argues that this unequal treatment of black and white victims of rape and other sexually violent acts are a product of capitalism. She writes:

The relative invisibility of black women victims of rape also reflects the differential value of women's bodies in capitalist societies. To the extent that rape is constructed as a crime against the property of privileged white men, crimes against the bodies of less valuable women – women of color, working-class women, and lesbians, for example – mean less or mean differently than do those against heterosexual white women from the middle and upper classes. (9)

Aside from the societal depiction of black women as victims of sexual crimes, black women usually respond to sexual crimes committed by a black man differently than white women. Black men and women often view rape laws and convictions as a way to terrorize black males. Rape charges were often used to justify lynchings and executions in the first half of the twentieth century. This historical context makes it difficult for black women to often believe that black men are capable of rape and often side with the accused male, regardless of the race of the victim (V. Smith 8). Black women also feel disloyalty to the betterment of the race when they report a rape by a black man. Black women believe the report will damage the image of the race, especially when a socially powerful black man is involved (James 135). Black women also know that black men

face harsher sentences and more brutal treatment than white perpetrators, which also deters reporting (Joseph and Lewis 111). Black female victims of sexual crimes face barriers from both white and black communities – they face being labeled as a whore deserving of the attack or disloyal to the race (James 135).

Domestic abuse is also viewed differently by black and white feminists. Whereas white feminists have centered this issue in their agenda building, black women are less likely to air this issue in public. Many blacks feel that discussion of battering and abuse will discredit the black man and make it more difficult to erase violent stereotypes that they endure (Richie 398).

Linked to issues of sexuality, a final agenda item that divides black and white women is heterosexism. Conflict between lesbians and the mainstream women's movement started in the early 1970s. The beginnings of the gay liberation movement coincided with the demand for recognition by lesbians in the women's movement (Taylor and Whittier 173). Betty Friedan, founder of the National Organization of Women, defined the lesbian uprising in the women's movement as "the lavender herring" of the women's movement (Taylor and Whittier 173). The mainstream women's movement often fails to embrace lesbian agenda items because of the desire to discredit the charges that all women who challenge traditional patriarchal roles are lesbian (Rupp 290). Lesbian feminism started to emerge as a separate branch from the mainstream women's movement in 1971 with the creation of the Furies (Taylor and Whittier 173). Because black feminists viewed heterosexism as being another form of oppression that originated from the same matrix of domination as race and gender, black feminists, both lesbians

and heterosexuals, embraced the agenda item. Black lesbian groups started to appear (Joseph and Lewis 35). One of the black lesbian groups at the forefront was the Combahee River Collective, whose name was inspired by the South Carolina river where Harriet Tubman facilitated a military campaign in the nineteenth century (Guy-Sheftall, "Preface" 231). The organization focused on radical activism over liberal politics (James 77). This organization was one of the first to articulate an integrative approach to fighting oppression through the combination of race, class, gender and sexuality (James 78). The Combahee River Collective issued a "Black Feminist Statement" which outlined the goals and issues that were important to the group. The statement advanced that:

we reject the stance of lesbian separatism because it is not a viable political analysis or strategy for us. It leaves out far too much and far too many people, particularly black men, women, and children...lesbian separatism...completely denies any but the sexual sources of women's oppression, negating the facts of class and race. (236)

Cheryl Clarke argues that one cause of the lesbian separatism that exists in the mainstream women's movement is the narrow definition employed of lesbianism. Clarke states that the traditional definition of lesbianism is one that is only inclusive of emotional-sexual relationships between two women (242). Instead, Clarke argues that lesbianism is a "recognition, an awakening, a reawakening of our passion for each other and for the same" (242).

However, it is just not isolation from the women's movement that black lesbians feel. Heterosexual black women and black men also tend to ignore black lesbian issues.

Bonding with other women has been a longstanding tradition in the African-American community. However, there still exists an exclusion of lesbian issues among black heterosexual women (Lorde, "Age" 289). Part of this stems from the negative label of lesbianism by the black community. Homophobia disproportionately occurs in black culture (Joseph and Lewis 191). Blacks often label female assertion or resistance negatively as a lesbian act. This also dovetails with a fear in the black community that a surge of black women who are no longer dependent on black men will dismantle the strong relationships that the black community is based on (Lorde, "Age" 290).

Black men also exhibit hostility to black lesbians (Lorde, *Sister* 49). Black men believe that a rise in black lesbians, coupled with the rising number of black women who engage in heterosexual relationships with white men, will nullify their need for existence (Joseph and Lewis 37). Ironically, black lesbians are viewed by black males as identifying with white feminists and white culture. Lesbians are often paralleled to educated, resistant whites that fight for self-autonomy and actualization. This focus on individualism is seen as counter-intuitive to the fight for overall black liberation (Joseph and Lewis 191). This fear of being labeled as a hindrance to the promotion of the race has caused many black lesbians to remain in hiding, caught between the racism of white lesbians and the hostility of black women (Lorde 122). Finally, lesbianism is often ignored in the black community because it serves as the ultimate resistance against sexism, which the black community still chooses to ignore. Lesbianism is seen as being women-centered and the paramount battleground of patriarchy (Taylor and Whittier 184).

The failure to recognize intersections of oppression has led the feminist movement to construct agendas through a white, privileged lens. Issues such as employment discrimination, health care, sexual violence, and heterosexism are viewed differently by white women and black women. Experiences with these issues differ which leads to different focuses and different suggested mechanisms for solving them.

Aside from facing racism in the mainstream women's movement, black women face a double barrier with the sexism that exists in the black liberation movement. This oppression also defines some key aspects of black feminist thought. From the mid-1920s to the end of the 1960s, the majority of black leaders did not argue for women's rights (hooks, *Ain't* 176). Black women were ignored when it came to leadership roles in the civil rights movement and their activism was not seen as being vital to the maintenance of the movement. Activist Stokely Carmichael stated casually that the best position that a black woman could hold in the [civil rights] movement was prone (Wallace 221).

Much of the current literature depicts the Black liberation movement as a revolution trying to equate black male power with the power held by white men. Clearly, neither black women nor white women are liberated by this goal (Murray 189). The stereotype of black women being the matriarch was abundant in civil rights discourse and literature (Murray 192). In covering the civil rights movement, an issue of *Ebony* magazine stated that black women "should be the establishment of a strong family unit in which the father is the dominant person...the Negro woman would do well to follow the Jewish mother" (Murray 189). On many occasions, the matriarchy myth was used by black men to coerce black women into believing that a matriarchal status is the dominant

one in the relationship (Terrelonge 497). Black men often stated that the traditional role dichotomy was needed in order to preserve the race (P. Collins 86). Black men saw strong white women calling for an end to the traditional role of woman as mother and feared such self-assertion by women of color. The call for motherhood was an attempt to exclude black women from the Civil Rights Movement. Black men used it as a means to keep black women from gaining leadership roles in the black liberation movement and aligning with the mainstream women's movement (P. Collins 87). The roles that women did play in the civil rights movement mirrored motherhood. They were called upon to provide support and comfort roles for their husbands, brothers, and sons (Joseph and Lewis 110).

Another reason for the exclusion of black women from the Civil Rights Movement was the need for black men to demonstrate their ability to protect "their" women in order to prove that they were worthy of masculine privilege (hooks, *Ain't* 94). Primary black leaders of the liberation movement, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, and Marcus Garvey, argued that it was necessary for black women to be in a subordinate status and remain absent from the public sphere (hooks, *Ain't* 95). Black men often separated themselves from and ostracized the women's movement as a ploy to show strength to white males. Militant leader Amiri Baraka published an essay in *Black World*, touting the need for inferior status for women. He wrote:

Jim Brown put it pretty straight and this is really quite true. He says there

are black men and white men, then there are women. So you can indeed be going through a black militant thing and have yourself a woman. The fact that she happens to be black or white is no longer impressive to anybody, but a man who gets himself a woman is what's impressive. The battle is really between white men and black men whether we like to admit it that is the battlefield at this time. (hooks, *Ain't* 97)

While white men and women could not empathize with the black culture they had economically exploited, it was easy to understand black men's assertion for "manhood" (hooks, *Ain't* 98).

A third factor in the exclusion of women from the black liberation movement was the false notion that women's rights and blacks' rights were mutually exclusive. Many leaders in the black liberation movement felt that racial oppression must be prioritized over gender oppression. Fighting both fronts simultaneously meant failure (P. Collins 247). Black community and family were often described as the key issues in black culture. Resources devoted to other issues, such as the eradication of sexism, were viewed as a direct trade-off with the betterment of the black community (Joseph and Lewis 111). bell hooks writes that "the struggle for black liberation and the struggle for women's rights were seen as inimical largely because black civil rights leaders did not want the white American public to see their demands for full citizenship as synonymous with a radical demand for equality of the sexes" (*Ain't* 176).

The exclusion of women from the Civil Rights Movement was not only employed by men, but by many black women as well. Many black women felt that black liberation

could only occur through a maintenance of a strong black patriarchy (hooks, *Ain't* 182). Black women consistently argued that the race needed to be liberated before their gender was. Black women divorced themselves from the feminist movement out of fear that it would harm the Black liberation front (hooks, *Ain't* 176). Black women, therefore, mimicked the behavior of traditional white women and became consumed with notions of femininity and motherhood (hooks, *Ain't* 177). The absence of the majority of black women from the women's movement made it difficult for women's organizations to understand and embrace black perspectives on agenda issues.

Despite the barriers placed by black men and women, the black liberation movement did have its feminine heroines. Black women activists were very visible on the local front (Joseph and Lewis 109). However, few women were able to gain national recognition. Angela Davis, Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Kathleen Cleaver became romanticized icons of female representation of the civil rights movement (James 101). Black women, such as Parks and Hamer, were known for their individual actions, whereas younger women like Davis and Cleaver were known for their associations. Davis, Cleaver, and others became known as sweethearts of the Black Panther party. They were often deemed as revolutionaries. They received public notoriety for their linkages to armed struggle (James 101). Despite their inclusion in civil rights organizations and the public spotlight, many of these women often endured discrimination and abuse by fellow male organization members (James 102). Many of the women who were leaders within the black nationalist movement obtained their positions because of personal relationships with the male leaders. These women often

found themselves ignored, harassed, or treated as sex objects (Joseph and Lewis 53). At one antiwar protest sponsored by a black activist group, a woman leader rose to speak on stage with her male comrades and was met with shouts of “Take her off and fuck her” from the audience (Joseph and Lewis 53).

The inability to find a place in the women’s movement or the black liberation movement led to the formulation of black women’s organizations, such as the National Black Feminist Organization and the Combahee River Collective (Joseph and Lewis 33; Guy-Sheftall, “Preface” 231). Out of these organizations came a surge of black feminist scholarly writings, creative writings, art, and thought (P. Collins 9). Despite the hostility and exclusion that women of color faced from the women’s movement and the black liberation movement, black women utilized these barriers as a site for resistance. Black women gained ideas, strength, and network capabilities with other women of color through these channels (James 75).

Although black feminist thought is inherently fluid and continuously expanding, Alice Walker advances the term “womanist” to define individuals who have engaged in black feminist theorizing. Walker believes this term addresses the solidarity of humanity, which is at the core of black feminist thought. She writes that “womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender...a womanist is committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female...a womanist is not a separatist...all people are people of color” (P. Collins 42).

The literature reviewed in this analysis clearly defines a black feminist epistemological methodology that the communication discipline can utilize in its

research. Central to the methodology is the incorporation of experiences outside the white dominant paradigm that guides societal practices and thought. This methodology primarily includes the recognition of how the intersection of immutable characteristics can affect an individual's life and relationships with others. A black feminist methodological approach for a rhetorical study includes both the discourse that is advanced and the discourse that is not spoken. It is the ability to recognize that liberatory discourse, even from those oppressed, can still reify dominant paradigms by framing experiences solely through a white dominant lens. This recognition can occur through choices the speaker makes in depicting historical examples and contemporary social issues. This black feminist epistemology will be used in the following chapter to analyze a piece of women's liberation movement discourse. The analysis will question whether or not the rhetor advances a white essentialist standpoint through her discussion of racial issues, her inclusion of historical events, and her focus on specific agenda items.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF ELEANOR SMEAL'S ADDRESS

Raymie McKerrow argues that rhetorical scholars consistently place their research in a framework that is based on universalistic assumptions that privilege reason as the path to truth. McKerrow advances the concept of critical rhetoric as a means of escaping this paradigm and to set forth a process of examinations that focus on the aspects of freedom and domination (125). Cornel West advances that a critical rhetoric “can serve a demystifying function” by exposing the often unintentional and silent attempts that rhetoric can hide knowledge and power relationships (18). Kent Ono and John Sloop state that “to sustain critical praxis, the critic dons the persona of one who has raised questions about culture and who has attempted to understand them...such a future begins once we acknowledge the cultural relationships that lead us to change our worlds” (“Commitment” 58-9). A rhetorical scholar engaged in a critical approach often reveals the manner in which discourse, which may appear liberatory on its face, can inadvertently reinscribe the very power relations it is trying to disrupt.

This chapter will provide a critical analysis of Eleanor Smeal's 1985 National Press Club Address using black feminist epistemologies. The analysis will identify themes and agenda items articulated in Smeal's address and then critique them through a lens of black feminist perspectives. Background information about Smeal as the president of the National Organization of Women as well as the controversies

surrounding her address will be given. Eleanor Smeal as an orator will be analyzed. Questions of essentialism, white solipism, race-sex analogies, and issue focus will be addressed.

Background of Eleanor Smeal's Address

Eleanor Smeal addressed the National Press Club on September 05, 1985 in Washington, D.C. The speech was her first after winning back the presidency of the National Organization of Women (NOW) (DeFrancisco and Jensen 31). At the time of her address, NOW's membership had dropped from a peak of 220,000 members to 150,000 and was two million dollars in debt (Gailey A18; Ferraro 1). The address was given before 300 NOW supporters, reporters on assignment, and National Press Club members. As part of the Club's regular luncheon series, Smeal's speech was aired on 1900 stations on the Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network and over 300 National Public Radio stations (DeFrancisco and Jensen 32).

This particular speech was selected for analysis for several reasons. Initially, accessibility was a primary factor. As discussed in Chapter One, full-text addresses by women communicators are not easy to locate. The DeFrancisco and Jensen anthology, where Smeal's address was found, also provides media highlights covering the event and a biographical depiction of Smeal which aided the analysis. Second, the artifact needed to be representative of traditional women's liberation discourse. Smeal has served in leadership positions for a variety of feminist organizations. Smeal is a very noticeable voice in the women's movement. Third, this particular speech seemed ripe for study.

Smeal discusses the issue of race which is often difficult to find in discourse from other feminist leaders.

Two important events serve as key backdrops to Smeal's address. The first is the controversy surrounding Smeal's re-election to the presidency of NOW. The election was covered extensively by the media and was reported to be the most hotly contested election in an organization that is known for its bitter election battles (Klemesrud 48; Spake 13). Smeal's first tenure as president of NOW was from 1977 to 1982, where she served two terms (Ferraro 1). The by-laws of the organization prevented Smeal from a third consecutive term in office, so she appointed Judy Goldsmith as her successor (Spake 13). During her tenure, Goldsmith had successfully negotiated her way through the conservative political trappings of the Reagan administration and got Geraldine Ferraro on the 1984 Democratic presidential ticket (Lemley 12; Spake 13). The tumultuous campaign divided the organization between women who backed Goldsmith's ability to play power politics in Washington and women who backed Smeal's passion and idealism (Cuniberti 1; Spake 13). Betty Freidan, one of the founders of NOW, stated that the election schism was a "profound paralysis of the women's movement...[these] diversionary power struggles are draining energy from the task at hand" (Spake 13). Bitter words were exchanged between the two camps as accusations over physical assaults, wrongful public relation practices, and unethical balloting procedures were tossed back and forth (Spake 13). Smeal, surprisingly, won the election by 136 votes (Lemley 12) and immediately called for the resignation of 30 NOW staff members, which further ignited hostilities (Quigley 2099). The majority of members on NOW's executive

board did not support the Smeal presidency, which further complicated Smeal's leadership abilities (Spake 14). Smeal had inherited a very weak, divided, and bankrupt organization.

A second important factor contributing to the setting of Smeal's address was a judicial decision from the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals issued just days before Smeal's speech. The three-judge panel overturned a previous decision that had ordered the State of Washington to give substantial wage increases to over 15,000 female state workers. The original decision had cited that these women were not given parallel wages to men holding the same jobs with comparable skills ("NOW" A16). The decision reversal was based on the statement that the "1964 Civil Rights Act does not obligate the State of Washington to eliminate an economic inequality it did not create" (Beck C18). This decision came at a time when the Reagan Administration, Capitol Hill, feminist organizations, business lobbies, and labor unions hotly debated comparable worth. The Reagan Administration had referred to the concept as "cockamamie, hairbrained, and looney tunes" and celebrated when the decision was rendered (Trimel 1). The plaintiffs immediately stated that the decision was only a minor setback and that they would appeal the decision to the Supreme Court (LaVally 1).

Analysis of the Speaker

It is important to analyze what Eleanor Smeal represents in regard to feminist thought and black feminist criticism. Lawrence Rosenfield introduces the source variable as a primary aspect of rhetorical criticism. Rosenfield argues that the source of the rhetoric is important to study in order to understand intent behind the words being spoken

and the credibility afforded by the audience based on the authority of the rhetor (78). The source of the discourse as a site for criticism is especially important in this analysis, since a significant amount of black feminist thought emerges from the belief that white mainstream feminists do not share similar experiences with black women.

Smeal is the daughter of middle-class Italian immigrants and was educated at Duke University, where she was a member of the Phi Beta Kappa organization (Ferraro 1). She earned her graduate degree at the University of Florida, where she met her future husband, Charles Smeal, who was a high-earning engineer (Schmich C1). Smeal became the first “housewife” elected to the NOW presidency – the position served as her first full-time paid job (Schmich C1). She was employed as a political consultant in Washington, D.C. at the time of her re-election (Ferraro 1).

Smeal’s background embodies the criticism that many black women advance about members of the mainstream women’s movement. Smeal is a highly educated woman and even reiterated her educational background in her address. Smeal graduated from an elite university that did not allow blacks to enroll in the years she attended. Many black women criticize that the women’s movement excludes women who do not have extensive educational backgrounds (Joseph and Lewis 37). Smeal also does not embody a working-class ideal. Although her parents were immigrants, Smeal was never impoverished. Her parents had enough money to send her to an elite school and provide a middle-class life. Smeal then married an engineer and was afforded the luxury of being able to stay at home and raise her children. The lack of experience in dealing with economic disparity would also make it difficult for Smeal to be embraced by black

feminists. Frances Beale writes “another major differentiation is that the white women’s liberation movement is basically middle class. Very few of these women suffer the extreme economic exploitation that most black women are subjected to day by day. This is the factor that is most crucial for us” (153). Not only does Smeal come from a position of wealth, she is doubly marked for not having been in the workforce. Many women of color would find it difficult to believe that a woman who has never faced the exploitation of the labor market would be able to relate to women who have. Although she would still don the housewife image during the third term of her presidency, she would also be seen as a political elite due to her consulting position in Washington, D.C. Most black feminists prefer fighting oppression outside the political and state-based channels and in community-based activist sites (P. Collins 287).

Not only does Smeal represent the typical middle-class, educated, elite white feminist that many black feminists find difficult to align themselves with, Smeal’s association with the National Organization of Women is also problematic. At the time of Smeal’s address, it was the largest and most well known mainstream women’s movement organization. It was founded by a group of middle-class women who were concerned with legal equalities for women but not with questioning the social and economic structure of American society (Joseph and Lewis 58). This organization differed from other women’s organizations of the movement era because it was created in a top-down approach, not from a grassroots uprising. NOW had specific structural hierarchies and campaigned actively for committed members (Joseph and Lewis 59). It was also comprised primarily of white, educated, middle-class women. A 1974 demographic

survey of the organization found that only 5% of its' members were black, 60% had completed an undergraduate education, and 30% had advanced degrees (Joseph and Lewis 59). Part of this race and education discrepancy is linked to the massive number of NOW chapters that were created in suburban areas (Joseph and Lewis 59). Clearly, NOW represented the typical white feminist organization that had failed to include perspectives different from its' white, middle-class, educated majority membership. The fact that Smeal was representing NOW while she was delivering her address is bound to affect her level of credibility and sincerity with anyone who is critical of the unidimensional representation of her organization.

It is also important to analyze the goals that Smeal outlined for the future of the organization during her third term as president. One of Smeal's primary goals was to increase the organization's sagging membership. She stated that she wanted to expand the group by broadening the ages of members. Demographics revealed that the average range of ages of members was 25 – 45. Smeal stated that the organization needed to mount recruiting campaigns at colleges and universities to attract young, educated women into the organization (Gardner, "NOW" 25). This fed the elitism argument that many black women advance about the organization. Smeal's public declarations of wanting to recruit educated women from colleges and universities does not speak to minority groups who are disproportionately absent on college campuses.

Smeal also had very specific goals for the organization, both in her first and second terms as president. Smeal was very committed to the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. She was president of NOW when the amendment went to the states for

ratification and was committed to reviving the agenda item in her third term as president. The media consistently linked the ERA to Smeal (Beyette 1), which certainly did not bode well for relations with black women. Mary Frances Berry argued that one primary reason for the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment was the failure of the campaign to educate, mobilize, and include black women (10). The fight for the ERA was seen as synonymous with other struggles, such as the right to vote and equal pay, which have traditionally been fought by white women (Joseph and Lewis 57). Another reason the ERA was not heavily supported by black feminists was due to how quickly Smeal and the NOW executives dispelled myths that it would enhance homosexual rights. Smeal was publicly adamant that the amendment would not give homosexuals any more rights (Ferraro 1). The hasty delinking of the ERA and gay rights could have been seen as an attempt to separate the traditional feminist movement from minority women.

Smeal was also committed to ending pornography, which she argued was a primary example of how women are objectified in the American rape culture (Ferraro 1). This focus also did not appeal to women of color. Although pornography and sexual objectification affected black women, black feminists focused on different causes than white feminists. Many black feminists argue that the portrayal of black women in pornography is an extension of the historical treatment of their actual bodies during the slavery era and economic exploitations since (Forna 103). Gloria Cowan and Robyn Campbell studied the portrayal of African-American women in pornography and found that black women were disproportionately represented in scenes of domination, bondage, and submission compared to white women. The study also showed that the majority of

scenes where black women were submissive involved one or more white men (324). It is also important to note that many black feminists feel that pornography is not only sexual exploitation, but also economic exploitation. It is, yet, another ill of capitalism that white women fail to question.

It is important to note that Smeal did recognize that the organization was not appealing to minority women. When asked why the convention delegates for NOW were overwhelmingly white, Smeal stated that:

I wish there were more blacks here. Traditionally, a lot of minority members do not join organizations that they don't see as serving their interests. I don't think NOW has picked up the right issues. There are so many issues that NOW has to address that race has not been in the forefront as much as it should be. (Gardner, "NOW" 25)

Smeal also pointed to preferential balloting as an indicator that the organization was trying to increase minority membership. This balloting procedure existed to push for a minimum of 30% representation of minorities on the organization's executive board (Gilliam B1).

These responses by Smeal actually differ from other public responses that NOW executive members have made on the lack of minority representation in their organization. Executives previously argued that minority women should develop their own subsidiary chapters rather than incorporate their agenda items into the regular chapters (D. King 305). Mainstream feminist Gloria Steinem answered critics who questioned the whiteness of the women's movement by stating that minorities were

represented through the organizations they created (Gardner, “Women’s” 27). When asked why the feminist movement did not incorporate issues, one executive in the early 1970s stated that the organization would not be “guilt-tripped” (hooks, *Ain’t* 150). Issues that were important to black women’s agendas, such as welfare and comprehensive health care, were often publicly scoffed as not being central to the needs of all women (hooks, *Ain’t* 149). When black women were focused on in the feminist movement, they were often described as welfare mothers and rape victims. Many black women felt that this occurred merely so white feminists could inflate the statistics to better sell women’s plight (Wallace 225). Smeal’s words on the under-representation of minority women in NOW certainly differed from previous statements. However, a glance at the agenda items that Smeal wanted to pursue certainly contributed to the previous trend of focusing on white women’s agenda items.

Aside from acknowledging the lack of minority representation in the NOW organization, Smeal also fought for the elimination of other injustices, which is a further distinction between Smeal and her NOW executive predecessors. She was one of nine individuals arrested for protesting apartheid at the South African embassy (“Jackson” A6). Smeal also was instrumental in mobilizing a protest against Winn Dixie stores that the Southern Christian Leadership Council had long accused of sexual and racial discrimination practices (Ferraro 1). Smeal was also fundamental to incorporating a broader based gay rights’ agenda to NOW (Omang A2). Smeal also has shown this willingness to include minority women more recently in her participation in the Feminist

Majority, where she has created conferences and conventions for white and black feminists to meet and set similar agendas (Scales 9).

In this analysis, it is certainly apparent that the source of the delivered rhetoric clearly impacts the way the message is received by a black feminist audience. Although Smeal appears to be more inclusive of various perspectives than many of her NOW predecessors, she still stands as an icon for the collective that black women feel alienated and distanced from. Smeal's background as an educated, elite white woman, her leadership position in a very formalized, white organization, and her traditional white feminist goals makes it difficult for a black feminist to separate her from a traditional white feminist epistemological standpoint and praxis.

Analysis of the 1985 National Press Club Address

In her first public address since winning her re-election bid for the NOW presidency, Eleanor Smeal's discourse, on face, certainly calls for the increased mobilization and support from all women to continue battling specific agenda items, such as comparable worth and legalized abortion. However, a critical analysis of the Smeal's discourse through a black feminist lens will unveil a continuation of traditional white feminist goals and objectives. It is apparent through her use of examples, analogies, and issue focal points that Smeal fails to shed her white privilege. It is also important to note the areas that Smeal remains silent about, which is a further extension of black feminist criticism of feminist thought and practice.

The first rhetorical pattern ripe for analysis is Smeal's consistent usage of historical examples in her address. In her renewed commitment for passage of the Equal

Rights Amendment, Smeal discusses how hard the suffragists fought for the right to vote. She discusses how the suffragists would continue tackling different obstacles, such as fighting at the state level when stopped at the federal level. Smeal argues that the suffragists fought until the vote was secured for women and that the current liberation movement must fight as hard until equality of the sexes is guaranteed (DeFrancisco and Jensen 37).

This parallel of the suffragist movement to the women's liberation movement is problematic through a black feminist lens. The suffrage movement divorced itself from fighting racial issues in 1869 when Frederick Douglass, an ardent advocate for women's right to vote, pleaded with the suffragist movement to focus on race issues. Douglass argued that timing created a sense of urgency for combating racial injustices (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 5). Immediately following Douglass' proclamation, suffragists Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton created the National Woman Suffrage Association because they felt betrayed by male leaders who agreed with Douglass' stance (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 6). Not only did women suffragists deny inclusion of the race issue during this time period, many aligned themselves with known racists to further their cause. Wanting to gain the southern vote, many suffragists at the end of the nineteenth century used racial slurs and argued that women's superior intellect and character afforded them the right to vote before racial minorities (D. King 305). Stanton even stated in a public address that it was absurd that the "inferior nigger" should receive the vote before "daughters of Jefferson, Hancock, and Adams are crowned with their rights" (hooks, *Ain't* 127). This racial hostility increased when female suffragists saw

that black men were going to get the vote before white women. White suffragists tried a variety of tactics, including more racial slurs, to try to persuade white men to side with white women instead of minority men (hooks, *Ain't* 3). A southern suffragist argued for the mobilization and organization of women in order to ensure white superiority (hooks, *Ain't* 127). Because many black women felt that the refusal by suffragists to include racial issues excluded them, black women created their own suffragist organizations. Many black women called upon suffragists, such as Anthony, for advice in how to create and maintain organizations. Anthony refused (Giddings, "When" 126). Ida B. Wells, known primarily for her intense anti-lynching campaign at the turn of the century, founded the first black women's suffrage club, the Alpha Suffrage Club, in 1893 (Guy-Sheftall, "Ida" 69).

An immense amount of black feminist thought is derived from historical contexts. Black women do not shape activism around the current injustices that black women face, but view it as a continuation of a history and a social order that have deprived them of equal status with white Americans. Many black women feel that the victory of the suffrage movement was another way to affirm white superiority. Although believing that all women should have the right to vote, black feminists argue that the white political sphere rewarded the overtly racist tactics of the white suffrage movement by passing the Nineteenth Amendment (hooks, *Ain't* 170). A black feminist would view Smeal's mirroring of the current women's movement battles with the historical suffrage movement as another recreation of history through a unitary, white perspective.

Aside from the actual split in the suffrage movement over inclusion of racial issues, focusing on suffragists is also problematic for the black feminist because most Americans trace the history of women's movements through a suffragist lens. Many Americans, including media and scholars, often argue that the women's movement was virtually dead after women received the right to vote with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1919. When the claims for suffrage were no longer being heeded, many believe the women's movement died off until the 1960s. That is an inaccurate depiction of women's movement history through the narratives of black women. The Harlem Renaissance, beginning in 1917, brought forth creative energies for many black women. Black women writers, such as Zora Neale Hurston, Angelina Weld Grimke, and Dorothy West, focused on the intersectional injustices that black women faced (Guy-Sheftall, "Triumph" 77). With the Harlem Renaissance serving as a backdrop, black feminism flourished during this time period. Black women mobilized around anti-lynching campaigns, unionizing, education, and improved working condition for domestic workers (Guy-Sheftall, "Triumph" 78). Black feminism during the 1950s, with advocates like Ella Baker, Jo Ann Robinson, and Daisy Bates, was also instrumental in facilitating the following decade's civil rights movement (Guy-Sheftall, "Triumph" 78). Smeal's discourse that focused on the suffragists' fight reinscribes notions of history through a white lens. It reifies the belief that suffrage was the quintessential peak of the women's movement and allows the invisibility of an alternative view of women's mobilization through a black feminist lens to continue. Smeal fails to highlight any instances of

struggle outside white women's struggles. Her exclusion ignores other times of struggle and fighting that occurred outside the traditional white suffragist movement.

Related to the suffrage example but worthy of its' own mention is Smeal's specific inclusion of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention. Smeal states that some men and women met and wrote a Declaration of Human Sentiments that was modeled after the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Human Sentiments advances equality for all men and women (DeFrancisco and Jensen 34). Although the text of the Declaration of Human Sentiments includes black women, the intent did not. Initially, it is important to recognize that only one black attended the conference and that was Frederick Douglass (Guy-Sheftall, "Introduction" 4). No black women attended this conference, whose primary purpose was to advance the rights of all individuals. Angela Davis argues that the Seneca Falls Convention "all but ignored the predicament of working-class women, as it ignored the condition of black women in the North and the South alike" (D. King 305). It is argued by many black feminists, including bell hooks, that overt attempts to exclude black women in women's battles, such as the Seneca Falls Convention, reveals the racist-sexist stereotypes that propagated the belief that black women were morally impure (hooks, *Ain't* 130). A white woman associating with a black woman impairs her standing as a lady. This explains why many black men, such as Douglass, Henry Garnett, and James Forten, were included in the white women's suffrage movement but, black women were not. White women felt competitive with black women in social standing and economic positioning (hooks, *Ain't* 132). Smeal's inclusion of the Seneca Falls Convention as a gathering to advance the rights of all

individuals is not only false, but, once again, furthers the white historical narrative. For Smeal to hail the Seneca Falls Convention as the place where all individuals were included continues the invisibility of the voice and experience of black women.

Another historical example that Smeal advances is repeating a quotation once stated by Thomas Jefferson. She reiterated the quotation of Jefferson that stated “the price of liberty is vigilance.” She then stated that the current battles that the women’s movement faces must be met with the same type of vigilance that Jefferson was speaking of (DeFrancisco and Jensen 36-7). Focusing on Jefferson is once again an appeal to the traditional white historical narrative. The majority of blacks do not associate Thomas Jefferson with liberty. Thomas Jefferson was a slave owner (Wright A6). Joy James articulates the paradox of linking individuals, like Jefferson, to values of liberty and freedom. She states:

Popularized Euroamerican ancestors include “founding fathers” George Washington and Thomas Jefferson and the sanctified Elvis. These icons evince complex relationships often obscured by facile representations of white American freedom and “civilization” that fail to acknowledge its dependency on enslaved or exploited African Americans. (32)

Jefferson was also once believed to have made statements regarding sexual relations between Africans and orangutans. Jefferson forwarded these beliefs because he felt black individuals had an animal level of intelligence, but in a human form (Marshall 8).

Thomas Jefferson does not embody freedom and liberty to the black community. He

owned slaves and participated in the system that furthered the bondage, oppression, and economic exploitation of a racial minority that was not afforded such liberties.

Not only do the examples that Smeal uses reify the grand white historical narrative, but they also unveil white solipism in practice. White solipism is the predisposition to think, imagine, and speak as if whiteness was the only way to describe the world. For example, history textbooks often elucidate the starting point of African-American and Native American histories as first interactions with white Europeans. Discourse that engages in the practice of white solipism tends to create images of a unitary experience, despite the diversity of individuals and experiences involved. This contributes to views and practices of essentialism.

Gender essentialism, according to Angela Harris, is the belief that a unitary women's experience can be isolated and depicted independently of class, sexual orientation, and race. Harris argues that the implications of essentialism include the silencing of marginal voices so others are privileged (582). Traces of essentialism can be found in Eleanor Smeal's address. Initially, there is no discussion by Smeal of minority women. Although Smeal discusses the race issue, it is often viewed as distinct from the gender issue, which denies the intersection of the two characteristics. Smeal refers to "women" throughout her speech as if it were a single, unitary collective of identities. The absence of recognizing that a variety of voices and experiences can occur within the category of "women" is to essentialize. bell hooks writes:

Throughout American history, the racial imperialism of whites has supported the custom of scholars using the term "women" even if they

are referring solely to the experience of white women. Yet, such a custom, whether practiced consciously or unconsciously, perpetuates racism in that it denies the existence of non-white women in America... white women liberationists did not challenge this sexist-racist practice; they continued it. (*Ain't* 8)

A good example of where Smeal remains silent about the differences that exist between white women and non-white women is the discussion of the “wage ghetto” (DeFrancisco and Jensen 33). Wages for black women are substantially lower than wages of white women and black men in comparable positions (Joseph and Lewis 275). Although Smeal ironically uses a term associated with minority groups to create an image of gender wage disparity, she creates the image that all women, regardless of race, suffer similar inequities. Another example of Smeal’s essentialist discourse is her discussion of Jerry Falwell’s visit to Kenya to mobilize support against Bishop Tutu (DeFrancisco and Jensen 35). She states that Falwell’s trip is an example of “thinly veiled racism.” She further expands by saying that this racism occurs alongside “thinly veiled sexism” (DeFrancisco and Jensen 35). This discursive stance of Smeal relies upon racism and sexism being distinct categories, void of intersections. She is reinforcing the belief that sexism is lived through white women’s experiences by separating it from the experiences of racism. Through her silence on the issue of minority women as well as examples of a unified women’s experience separate from race, Smeal continues the paradox that hooks describes. Her discourse fails to challenge, and even reifies, the belief that experiences had by white women are the totality of women’s experiences.

Another aspect of Smeal's address that is ripe for study is the agenda items that she includes. Smeal spends a great deal of time discussing comparable worth, the term used to discuss equal wages for equal work. Smeal begins her speech with a description of the Ninth Circuit Appeals Court's decision to overturn a verdict that would increase pay of state female workers. She indicts the rationale for the Court's decision, stating that the system that masculine privilege created should be responsible for equalizing the wages. Smeal calls for women to mobilize and continue the fight for equal pay (DeFrancisco and Jensen 33-4). This disparity in pay is an especially important issue for women of color, although Smeal does not speak to the differences that exist among women. One fundamental concept that is missing from Smeal's discourse from a black feminist perspective is a criticism of capitalism. A crucial distinction between black feminist thought and traditional feminist thought is the focus on capitalism and economic exploitation. Black feminists argue that the root cause of many of the oppressions they face is from the free enterprise system that has historically commodified the body of black women to maximize profit in a system controlled by white, elite males (Terrelonge 491). Smeal's focus parallels the feminist silence on the issue of capitalism. For a black feminist, Smeal's analysis of the wage discrepancies is shallow, incomplete, and exclusive of minority experience. A second key point is that women of color are not concerned with equal pay compared to their black male counterparts. Instead, black women want to secure health care benefits and income to support their families, which means pay increases for either black men or black women (P. Collins 52).

Another agenda item that Smeal focuses on in her address is the continued legalization of abortion. Smeal argues that the right to choose pregnancy is parallel to the right to survive for women. She also states that the fight for abortion rights is really a fight for birth control. Smeal states:

We are fighting, I believe, for fundamental liberty and justice in our lives. Look at the abortion issue – the right to determine when and if you’re going to be pregnant – really, the right to survive...I feel without question, that we are dealing with life and death, that women have the right for their lives and their opportunities...The fight to outlaw abortion is fundamentally an attack on birth control. Let’s make no mistake about that...I believe that every woman and every man who cares about a quality of life worth fighting for had better stand up, while they can still stand up, and join with us in a fight to keep abortion and birth control safe and legal (DeFrancisco and Jensen 36).

She chastises the Pope for preaching to individuals in Kenya to avoid birth control practices despite the mass starvation occurring in the country (DeFrancisco and Jensen 34). Smeal’s abortion discourse is problematic for a black feminist in several ways. Initially, the equating of abortion with the right to survive does not ring true for black women. As discussed in Chapter Three, black women are concerned with higher mortality rates for them and their children and comprehensive medical care. Black women certainly embrace the pro-choice movement; they were disproportionately

affected by unsafe abortions before *Roe v. Wade*. However, to equate abortion with the paramount issue for women's right to survival does not hold true for black women.

A second problem with Smeal's analysis of abortion for a black feminist is the equating of abortion as birth control. Black women, at the time, were primarily concerned with birth control that reversed women's choice. The federal government created sterilization clinics in minority neighborhoods where women of color were often persuaded and manipulated to undergo sterilization procedures. Women of color were offered desperately needed cash in exchange for sterilization. In many localities, sterilization was a requirement to receive welfare relief funds (Beale 151). Black women are also aware that the luxury of birth control for white women came at a heavy price for minority populations. The federal government often used minority neighborhoods for testing new birth control options and surgeries. Many black women died or harmed in government testing of various birth control pills as well as the perfecting of surgeries such as hysterectomies and salpingectomies (Beale 152).

A third area of concern for black feminism in Smeal's, as well as the mainstream women's movement, discourse of abortion was the failure to incorporate making legal abortions safer for minority women. In her National Press Club address, Smeal focuses the majority of her abortion rhetoric on keeping abortions legal. Her attempt to mobilize women to march in Washington was to keep abortion legal. Although legalized abortions are important to women of color, it is certainly not the entirety of the issue. Women of color as well as poor women faced substandard health clinics and doctors that performed abortions. Smeal's discourse about keeping "abortion and birth control safe and legal"

(DeFrancisco and Jensen 36) denies the experiences of women that are still facing unsafe abortion and birth control options, despite its' legalization.

A final discursive strategy that Smeal uses to detail the abortion debate is defining men as the enemy in the battle for women's choice. She states that "most people who want to debate this question [legalized abortion] are men...I can't help but noticing that most of the people picketing abortion clinics are also males...they never will have to face this decision. But we do" (DeFrancisco and Jensen 35-36). Smeal clearly draws a line between men and women in this fight to maintain legalized abortions. Although not only unique to the abortion debate, many black feminists criticize the women's movement for constructing men as the enemy. It is unthinkable for many women of color to separate themselves from men of their race. It is viewed as being counterproductive to their fight for racial injustice. It is very important for black women to maintain strong ties to the black community, which makes it difficult for black women to isolate themselves from black men in the fight against sexual injustices. Black women are in an incredible double-bind: they are fighting racial injustices in which strong ties with black men are necessary while at the same time fighting patriarchy and masculine domination. Most black women reconcile this by claiming that their fight is not against men, but the system of capitalism that has exploited them (Joseph and Lewis 39). Smeal's discursive tactic of male enemy construction makes it difficult for black women to embrace her goals, because to do so would be to abandon much needed ties in their fight against racial oppression.

A third agenda item that Smeal focuses on is her commitment to the revival of the Equal Rights Amendment. Smeal discusses the reintroduction of the initiative in Vermont and the right wing's attack on the amendment. Smeal reiterates claims that many make linking the ERA to homosexual rights and AIDS (DeFrancisco and Jensen 37). Smeal states:

They [the right wing] make claims such as "ERA leads to AIDS." They try to make this great connection. And we either laugh, because we don't know what to do with it, or we avoid the issue...When they say ERA leads to AIDS, they are going after an oppressed class of people, lesbians and gay men...We are proud of fighting for the liberty of all people, and we are proud that we fight for gay and lesbian rights. We won't allow this issue to be distorted or to be used against women's equality. (DeFrancisco and Jensen 37)

Black women's absence from the ERA fight has already been briefly discussed above. Many black women felt that the Equal Rights Amendment was a crusade led by white, elite women. Supporters of the ERA did not mobilize large, grass-roots movements, but relied on small, formalized groups to fight at the federal and state levels. Black women also questioned why supporters of the ERA did not question race or class issues as well as the capitalist system (Joseph and Lewis 57). Black women felt that the ERA was not a front intended for them to fight on.

A final rhetorical strategy that Smeal uses that should be analyzed through a black feminist lens is her narrative about racial issues. She states:

When I went to college, I decided to go to Duke. I didn't know it was segregated...I didn't know very much about discrimination against black people in the South. But I got a crash course. Before you knew it, I was on the picket line at some movie theater in downtown Durham. It outraged me that black people were only allowed to sit in the unairconditioned balcony...The thing I will never forget is being called a "nigger-lover" and being spat on, because I believed people had a right to sit anywhere they wanted when they bought a ticket. I couldn't get over that hatred. I couldn't get over what made them think it was all right to call me such names. The reason I bring this up now is because we're about to fight all over again unless we make a stand today...It's being called the abortion issue (DeFrancisco and Jensen 38).

It should be noted that Smeal's introduction of the race issue should be commended. It has already been articulated that many public figures in the women's movement were not willing to take on the issue. However, the discursive strategy that Smeal uses to tell the narrative is problematic. She puts forth a race-sex analogy, comparing the battles that were fought against racial injustices to those fighting sexism. Initially, it is inaccurate for Smeal to project that the race issue has been completed. The last few sentences suggest that a fight needs to be rekindled, this time to battle the abortion opposition. This suggests that the fight against racial oppression has been finished, which is certainly an inaccurate depiction. Second, Smeal's race-sex analogy reifies the belief that the two are separate and distinct characteristics. Objects can only be compared to one another if they

are mutually independent from the other. To compare racism to sexism suggests that the two are mutually exclusive, which denies the possibility of intersections. A third problem with Smeal's rhetorical choice in this analogy is the continuation of the belief that the term "woman" is referring to white women exclusively. By separating race from gender, it furthers the belief that women are white women and blacks are black men, furthering the invisibility of black women.

A final argument that should be made about the race-sex analogy, and especially Smeal's use of it, is that it centers the race question through a white lens. Allowing white women to articulate that their oppression is synonymous with racial oppression nullifies the uniqueness that racial oppression has on minority men and women. It takes an experience that is not within the realm of white privilege and explains it as if it were. Smeal uniquely violates this concept. After telling the story of her picketing the Durham movie theater, she filters the narrative through a white lens by stating that she could not believe the names that she was called and the hatred exhibited to her. An audience would immediately empathize with Smeal and forget the hatred directed toward black men and women everyday. Smeal, although personally experiencing the narrative, took a story of oppression against a race and made it hers, re-centering the race issue in a veil of white privilege.

Eleanor Smeal advances a complex web of rhetoric and identity that simultaneously exposes and reifies many of the beliefs and criticisms advocated by black feminists. Unlike many of her predecessors, Smeal acknowledged her organization's failure to include minority women. Smeal consistently fought for the elimination of

racial injustices, from her picketing a Durham movie theater to protesting the South African embassy to end apartheid. She expanded her organization's goals to include gay and lesbian issues. However, many of the problems that black women have articulated about the women's liberation movement can be found in Smeal's identity and rhetoric. She is a middle-class, well-educated, elite white woman who is serving a third term as president of an organization that has publicly humiliated and excluded black women. Smeal's address fails to recognize distinct experiences of minority women and furthers the belief that all women have the same experiences. She engages in acts of white solipism by referring to key historical events and figures that are not only found in the white historical narrative, but are known to have excluded the voices of black women. She focuses on agenda items that black women experience and challenge in different manners. Smeal constructs men as the enemy in the war on abortion, which can not be endorsed by black women who are concerned with racial battles. Finally, Smeal creates a race-sex analogy that implies the racial battle has been completed, reiterates the notion that race and gender are distinct categories, and re-centers the race experience through a white lens. It is not the argument of this analysis that Smeal's rhetoric should be viewed as overtly racist. However, this critical analysis does argue that while the rhetorical strategies Smeal employs may further white women's liberation, it only further entrenches the domination and invisibility that black women have felt from their exclusion of the women's movement.

This rhetorical criticism is important to both the discipline and to the individual and organization being studied. The final chapter in this analysis will examine how this

research can serve as a springboard for further incorporation of black feminist ideologies into our discipline and how similar studies can provide avenues of activism for those in academia. It will also be argued that rhetorical critics have the responsibility to engage in studies that provide paths for critical self-reflexivity. This analysis is also significant because it can provide possible answers to questions of sagging membership for the National Organization of Women, which will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Eleanor Smeal, president of the National Organization of Women, addressed the National Press Club on September 05, 1985. The speech was the first public address that Smeal delivered after her hotly contested campaign to win re-election of the NOW presidency. During her first two terms, Smeal was known for her commitment to the Equal Rights Amendment passage, her consistent battles for maintaining safe and legal abortions, her calls for decreasing wage inequities between men and women of comparable skills, and her desire for eliminating sexual objectification of women in pornography. The *Washington Post* described Smeal's re-election has an "important milestone in the feminist movement's continuing debate over its tactics and direction" (DeFrancisco and Jensen 32). In regards to the NPC address, Smeal stressed that her intentions were to motivate and to give information that would convince individuals to change their lives (DeFrancisco and Jensen 33). In her speech, Smeal discussed recent setbacks to the elimination of pay inequities, the importance of rekindling the ERA movement, upcoming abortion protests, and attacks on key right wing players in Congress. Media attention devoted to Smeal's address primarily focused on her attacks of right-wing politicians and her ability to motivate an audience (DeFrancisco and Jensen 39).

This black feminist critical analysis of Smeal's discourse recognizes rhetorical patterns and themes that provide an alternative understanding of the message that Smeal presented. Although Smeal was more progressive than many of the leaders of the traditional women's liberation movement, her characteristics and her discursive choices warrant a critical approach using a methodology that will expand the scope of the discourse to include alternative voices.

Initially, it is important to provide answers to the research questions forwarded in Chapter One. First, what theories exist in the study of black feminism that unify it as a collective criticism of the women's movement? Many of these theories are found in the black feminism literature that discusses methods of understanding the relationship between race and gender characteristics in women of color. Black feminist ideologies that criticize the women's liberation movement rest primarily on the absence of women of color's experiences in the movement's discourse. The movement is often depicted through a lens of white privilege, with experiences of white women being advanced as the experiences of all women. These beliefs lead to exclusionary discursive practices, such as white solipism, rigid identity politics and race-sex analogies. These practices can also lead to specific agenda items and goals being forwarded that are only applicable to elite, white women's oppression. A rhetorical scholar that seeks to use black feminist ideologies as a method of criticism should examine how the discourse includes or excludes the possibility of intersecting experiences and oppressions of marginalized individuals.

Another key element in developing a black feminist methodology to criticize discourse is that it should be liberating for black women and true to their ideologies. It is simply not enough to utilize existing feminist rhetorical methods to analyze black women's discourse. Marsha Stanback states that the recent attempts by the communication discipline to include black women merely apply white female communicative norms and rhetorical theories (28). Researchers need to develop a fundamental understanding of black feminist thought and apply many of those ideologies to a variety of rhetorical artifacts. Scholars need to avoid prescribing existing theories and methodologies to black women's communication and then claiming the discipline has expanded to include their voices. It is a limited perspective to assert that further inclusion of black female rhetors is enough to include black women in our field. The field must commit to understanding the history, ideals, and goals that motivate black women to communicate in the manner that they do. It is imperative that an understanding emerges as to why many theories found in black feminism serve as criticisms of the capitalist system, the women's liberation movement, and the past and current civil rights movements. A methodology must be able to account for the multiple forms of intersecting oppressions which women of color experience. The same methodology should also be utilized from the standpoint of empowering change in women of color's position in society (Stanback 29).

The second research area that needs to be discussed is the themes or patterns that emerge in Eleanor Smeal's address which are susceptible to black feminist criticism. Smeal's discourse, as a speaker for the women's liberation movement, is ripe for black

feminist criticism. Her characteristics and experiences as a white woman should be considered a theme for study. She is a white, educated, upper-class woman whose only employment has been in the sphere of Washington politics and in leadership positions of the NOW organization. Her ability to speak for “all women” is shaded by her inability to speak from perspectives that are different from her white privilege. It is important to note that many feminists do not expect rhetors to speak for experiences that do not pertain to them. However, Smeal represents the continuation of a white privilege experience that has defined the organization she is speaking for and the movement that she symbolizes. This taints her ability to be able to connect and relate to women that do not share her same experiences.

A second rhetorical theme that emerges in Smeal’s rhetoric is her inclusion of historical examples that are grounded in traditional white privilege. Her discourse includes a variety of historical references that are viewed differently by black feminists and others outside the margins of dominant privilege. She specifically references the Seneca Falls Convention as an instance in history where women came together to fight for equality for all Americans. Her descriptive interpretation of this historical event ignores the criticisms that many black women advance about the absence of women of color. Smeal also parallels current battles over abortion and the ERA to struggles fought by suffragists for the right to vote. Smeal argues that it is going to take a comprehensive battle at all governmental levels, mirroring what occurred with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, to gain victories on agenda items. Once more, Smeal’s incorporation of this historical event is based on a white solipistic view of history. Black

women were often ignored, and even ostracized, from the suffrage movement.

Suffragists often forwarded racial slurs and epithets when it appeared that black men would get the vote before white women. Black women do not identify with the suffragist movement as the quintessential event in the progression of women's rights. History often ignores the period after passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and before the women's liberation movement of the 1970s. It is believed that feminist activism was virtually non-existent, because white, elite women were silent. However, viewing this time period through a black feminist lens shows that black women were very active during this time, such as fighting for unionization rights, the elimination of lynching, and more opportunities in the labor market. Many black women would better understand Smeal's call for strong activism if the historical parallels were drawn to events that their ancestors and community members were participants in.

A third rhetorical theme that is apparent in Smeal's discourse is the race-sex analogy that she draws. Smeal argues that the hard-fought battles against racial segregation need to occur again for sexual equality. Smeal includes an instance in which she fought against racial segregation at a North Carolina movie theater and describes the horrors of being called various derogatory names. Although it is important to note that Smeal recognizes the significance of racial oppression, her discursive characterization in her race-sex analogy is problematic. Smeal's linguistic depiction of the event constructs race and sex as being two distinct categories that can be compared to one another.

Analogies can only be accurate if they compare two like, but distinct, objects or concepts. Smeal's use of the race-sex analogy inadvertently denies the intersection or

interdependent relationship of race and gender characteristics. It masks the possibility that oppressions based on race and gender could either be intertwined or mutually dependent on one another. Black women do not experience sexism in the same way that white women do. Racism will always impact the sexist oppression that women of color face. This makes construction of the race-sex analogy impossible when one incorporates the voice of individuals who are at the intersection of the characteristics being compared.

Another problem that is inherent in race-sex analogies, and particularly apparent in Smeal's address, is the explanation of racial oppression through a voice of white privilege. Even though Smeal is oppressed because of her gender, she is still afforded privileges due to her skin color. To allow her to take her oppression and compare it to oppression based on a different characteristic nullifies the uniqueness of the other oppression. Racism is now explained, not from the voices of the oppressed, but through a lens of white privilege. Although it is important for individuals of white privilege to be anti-racist in order for racial inequities to be eradicated, it is inaccurate, and even counterproductive, to allow white individuals to describe racial oppression as *they* see it. This is an underlying consequence of comparing oppressions. The uniqueness of the oppression that individuals may face can be blunted. It also only serves to reify the dominant paradigm if all experiences are filtered through its' lens.

Another problem with Smeal's race-sex analogy is that it allows for racial oppression to gain legitimacy through the participation of white privilege. This is often the same argument that many feminists make in regard to males joining their movement. When members of the dominant group join a movement to fight oppression, the

movement gains false legitimacy merely through the participation of the new members. Smeal tries to gain understanding from her audience for racial inequities through her experiences in fighting racism. Smeal details how terrible she felt when she was called names like “nigger-lover.” Smeal does not describe the emotions of the black individuals on the picket line she witnessed. She relies on her experience in order to legitimize the racial injustices she was fighting, not the experiences of those that were truly experiencing the oppression. Privileged individuals, whether it is due to their race, gender, class, or sexual orientation, should be careful when entering a battle to fight oppression. Although support is typically needed from all sectors of society, oppression can not be effectively fought if it is only deemed worthy because members of a privileged group says it is. In order for true transformation to occur, society needs to legitimize the fight against the injustice on the merits of the issue itself.

A fourth rhetorical theme evident in Smeal’s address from a black feminist perspective is her incorporation of traditionally white agenda items. Smeal discusses issues of pay inequity, abortion, and the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Initially, these agenda items are experienced differently by women of color. Oppressions that elite, white women face from these agenda items are different than the experiences had by black women. Smeal makes no reference to the different experiences that women face when it comes to these issues. Also, white, liberal feminists in the women’s liberation movement have typically defined these agenda items. Pay inequity is an issue for black women, but it is not the totality of their employment oppression. Black women are fighting for inclusion in labor unions and an expanded sphere of employment

opportunities. White women are arguing for enhanced wages while many black women merely want the opportunity to earn wages. The Equal Rights Amendment is another agenda item that Smeal discusses that is not embraced by many black feminists. Black women view this liberal feminist agenda as being spearheaded by elite, white dominant feminist organizations. Smeal's discourse, which calls for action on specific agenda items, reifies the divide that exists between black and white feminists. Her discourse is not inclusive of goals that many black women view as being essential to their liberation.

A final rhetorical theme existing in Smeal's discourse is her binary construction of men and women in her discussion of abortion. Smeal argues that men are the primary opponents in the battle to keep abortion legal. Smeal depicts images of men and women as opposing entities in the abortion debate. As explained in Chapter Two, movement discourse that has been studied in the communication discipline regarding women's liberation shows that Smeal's construction of the male as the opposition to the group's goals is not unique to her or the organization she represents. Smeal's enemy construction supports the criticism that many black feminists have that traditional feminist organizations blame male members of society for the injustices. Black feminists reject this male/female dualism in the fight against oppression. Although black women are subjected to many of the same oppressions that white women face from men, black women have to remain in allegiance with black men in order to fight for racial oppression. Men are not the constructed enemy for black women. Black women often define the capitalist system as the enemy in which black men and women are exploited. Black women can not afford to sever ties and create divisiveness with black men. Those

ties are needed to combat the racial oppression and exploitation that they experience.

Smeal discursively separates men from the fight to end gender oppression. Her rhetorical construction is not a plausible tool for many black women who feel they have to simultaneously align with women to fight gender oppression and black men to fight racial oppression.

Aside from articulating the methodology used in this analysis and the rhetorical themes found in the artifact studied, it is important to articulate the significant implications of the study. Initially, this research can aid the individuals involved in producing the artifact, primarily Smeal, the National Organization of Women, and the women's liberation movement. It is apparent that membership numbers had dropped off significantly in the early 1980s, and Smeal made it well known that she desired to increase membership numbers. Knowledge produced through this black feminist critical approach might incite change in Smeal and others in their actions and discursive practices. Organizational leaders that value high membership numbers would find knowledge of why certain sectors choose not to belong to the group useful. Goals and agenda items are important factors in mobilization of a social movement, as discussed in Chapter Two. Smith and Windes advance that the articulation of similar goals is essential for movement mobilization ("Rhetoric" 1). If Smeal is sincere in her stated desires of increasing membership numbers, Smeal and the organization would be helped with knowing that their discourse may be excluding individuals that could be potential members and allies.

Tied to this is the concept advanced in Chapter Two regarding external factors and their influence on social movement behavior. Through the construction of her discourse, Smeal, as a representative of the women's liberation movement, furthers the divide between white and black feminists. This can lead to the construction of the black feminist movement as a countermovement to the traditional feminist organizations. Although it can be stated the goals of the white and black feminist movements are very similar, furthering the division between the two groups might actually cause a severance of ties that would cause the groups to seek agendas that are competing.

A second important concept that would be gained by Smeal's knowledge of the study lies in the unveiling of unintended acts. After studying Smeal as a leader, it is apparent that Smeal is concerned with the lack of minority women involved in the fight for liberation. Smeal has made numerous efforts to include minority women, such as fighting racial injustices and ensuring that a good proportion of her organization's leadership positions is filled with women of color. It could be effectively argued that Smeal does not intend to exclude black women from her cause and would be open to understanding how her discourse inadvertently divides women along racial lines.

Aside from how the rhetor could be significantly affected by this study, it is also important to examine how this study can benefit the discipline. Black women, both as orators and as theorists, have been primarily absent from our discipline. This study expands the field of rhetorical theory by allowing a diversity of voices and views that more accurately mirrors the demographics of American society. A great deal of attention has been devoted to including women as speakers and feminist theoretical approaches in

the discipline. However, the majority of this inclusion has been inclusive of primarily white women. This study serves as a springboard for further black feminist inquiry into the discipline and to highlight the need for the study of black women as communicators and theorists.

The rationale behind expanding the discipline to include more diversity lies in the linkages between academia and activism. First, it is first important to develop a black feminist understanding to embrace the black women in the communication discipline. Patricia Hill Collins describes the state of women of color in the academy as being “outsiders within.” Collins states that the assumptions that traditionally underlie membership in the academy deny the existence of black women. This concept can be seen in examples such as whiteness in feminism, maleness for African-American studies and a combination of whiteness and maleness in the majority of academic scholarship (P. Collins 12). Members of this discipline, who have earned similar degrees and devoted similar times to their male and white female counterparts, have earned the right to participate in a discipline that is willing to recognize the importance of their voices.

A second significant factor in the academy and activism arena is the importance of educational institutions in formulating knowledge for societal transformation. It is, first, an important site for community building and self-actualization in the African-American community. In 1892, Anna Julia Cooper first argued for the importance of education for the African-American community, especially for the liberation of black women (P. Collins 210). Many individuals, especially in the black community, link knowledge to power. In order for minorities to end a system of oppression and injustices,

many argue that it is important for individuals to battle exploitation and obtain power through knowledge (P. Collins 210). Including a more diverse range of oppressed voices in the academy is important for making knowledge available to those who seek transformation. A black feminist epistemological study in the communication discipline can lead scholars and students to develop understandings of the oppressive themes that may be present in discourse, despite any liberatory intent the communication act may have. This genre of study also directly opens up space for a more conducive environment for black women scholars.

A final significant link between the academy and activism took place in regards to the writer and her views on feminist thought. At the start of this project, I was a feminist who was white, educated, and middle class. The project was a self-reflexive critical evaluation of myself as much as it was of Smeal's discourse. If someone had asked me six months ago if I advocate the end of all oppression and injustice, I would have undoubtedly answered yes. However, I was unaware of how some of my own beliefs and discursive practices reified the dominant system that I was seeking to correct. As stated in Chapter Four, critical theory in the rhetoric field attempts to unveil the furthering of oppression that can often occur in liberatory discourse. Before this project, it had never occurred to me that my activist discourse could be oppressive discourse in disguise. Audre Lorde states that "the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us" (*Sister* 123). At a recent public lecture I attended, Joyce Elaine King ended her address by saying "be the change you want to see." That strikes at the

very heart of the significance of this project for me. Through the knowledge I have gained in academia, such as in this black feminist project, I can change who I am in order to advance the change that I want to see.

Despite the fact that this study primarily rested on recognizing differences in women's liberation movement discourse and black feminist epistemology, it is a fitting conclusion to discuss how these differences can lead to transformation. Differences in thought stem from differences in experiences. Audre Lorde argues that the possibility of women obtaining equality, and ultimately continued survival, is to recognize those differences and use those differences to unite. Lorde states:

As a tool of social control, women have been encouraged to recognize only one area of human difference as legitimate, those differences which exist between women and men...we have recognized and negotiated those differences...But our future survival is predicated upon our ability to relate within equality...Now, we must recognized differences among women who are our equals, neither inferior or superior, and devise ways to use each others' to enrich our visions and our joint struggles. (*Sister* 122)

Even though this analysis provides a criticism of Smeal's discourse, it is important to recognize that the motivation behind her address aligns with Lorde's call for uniting, despite differences. Smeal ends her address with the statement that "we've just begun" (DeFrancisco and Jensen 39). Rhetorical scholars, feminist scholars, black feminist theorists, and members of the women's liberation movement have only begun to scratch the surface of the knowledge that can be gained from developing an understanding of

black feminist epistemologies and their importance to the knowledge society possesses and the actions society takes. The rationale for this study was to further the cause of understanding, both for the writer and for the discipline. We must continue this endeavor by gaining more knowledge and more individuals that are committed to the cause. One thing that is apparent at the conclusion of this study is that we, as a discipline and as a society, have truly just begun.

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